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Building from the middle:
How middle managers construct their identities
as both leaders and followers

Alison I Rostron

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Chester for the degree of Master of Business Administration

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Abstract

This dissertation addresses the question of identity construction in the middle manager role, and seeks to integrate contemporary research on identity construction and leader-follower identity with research on the position of the manager “in the middle”. A conceptual model, the Middle Manager Role Matrix, is developed which identifies and interprets varying descriptions of middle manager behaviour within the context of key choices facing middle managers: whether to act as leaders or followers, and whether to prioritise relationships with subordinates or superordinates. The Middle Manager Role Matrix is tested through a case study of the Team Leader role within a large public sector organisation, using qualitative methods. The findings of the case study support the validity of the Middle Manager Role Matrix and the thesis that middle manager identity construction is related to the choices of leader/follower behaviour and subordinate/superordinate relationships. The dissertation therefore proposes ways in which the Middle Manager Role Matrix might be further refined, tested and integrated with existing models of leader-follower identity construction.

Declaration

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose.
All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed:

Date:

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

T.S Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

1.1 Background to the research

This research draws on two distinct threads within the wider literature on leadership, those of leader and leader-follower identity construction, and the middle manager function. The basis for the research is that, while much knowledge and insight have been developed for each thread, little attention has been paid to date to the interrelationship between the two.

1.1.1 Leadership and identity

Theories of identity and identity construction have been regularly drawn on to interpret leadership. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) draw on the work of Mead (1934) to develop a three-fold process of identity construction: Self-Identity, the individual's personal image of themselves; Identity Work, the active constructing of a self-identity; and Identity Regulation, where identity interacts with the external environment. Social and organisational contexts have been given particular attention with respect to leader identity. They may provide key events which encourage someone to view themselves as a leader (Toor and Ofori 2008), while organisational and job designs can "pre-structure" identity construction (Lührmann and Eberl 2007). Conversely, individuals can be resilient in maintaining self- and other images in the face of external environments (London 2002) because these images provide important contributions to self-worth (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006).

Identity literature also draws attention to the reciprocal relationships between leader and follower identities. Lührmann and Eberl (2007) use identity theory to interpret leader-follower relationships: in essence, both leaders and followers must find their respective identities as acceptable in themselves, and acceptable in relation to the other(s). Pye (2005) meanwhile, draws on sensemaking theory and notes the dual role of leadership, both in *shaping* key sensemaking reference points for subordinates, and *being* such a reference point for others to extract meaning.

1.1.2 Middle manager function

Increasingly, research is focussing on the predicament of the manager “caught in the middle” (Gabel 2002). Gabel (2002) argues that managers are typically subject to a variety of influences including supervisory ones. Jones and Kriflik (2006) note that as well as top-down pressures, middle managers and supervisors also have to negotiate the bottom-up pressures of their subordinates, their needs and expectations, which may be in conflict with those of the manager’s superordinates. The middle manager typically has to manage “nearby leadership” (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006) where leaders and followers work closely together, and where tensions between leader and follower expectations need to be intimately negotiated.

1.1.3 Team Leader identity construction

The genesis of this research project is the perceived gap between these two strands of leadership literature. On the one hand, the differing identity needs and constructions of leaders and followers are acknowledged. On the other hand, middle managers represent the reality for the majority of leaders, in that they are simultaneously leaders *and* followers. How, then, do managers construct their own leader-identities with their subordinates, in the context of also being (as a follower) part of the construction of their superordinate’s own leader-identity (and of course in the wider organisational context)?

1.2 The research question

The research carries out a case study of a specific middle manager (Team Leader) role in the context of the organisation in which they work. The research aims to identify how Team Leaders construct their identities, the nature of Team Leader identities and the organisational discourse on the Team Leader role. In particular, the research examines how Team Leaders interpret and relate their identities to the various potential roles suggested by their position between subordinates and superordinates.

The research aims are as follows:

- i. To understand contemporary thinking on leadership identity and identity construction
- ii. To understand contemporary thinking on the middle management function
- iii. To identify how Team Leaders in Liverpool Direct Limited's (LDL) Benefits Service construct their identities in the context of organisational, subordinate and superordinate constructs
- iv. To use the case study of Team Leaders in LDL's Benefits Service to
 - a. Draw conclusions as to how Team Leaders construct identities as both leaders and followers; and
 - b. Inform current theories and understanding of leadership identity

The findings of the case study suggest Team Leaders in the Benefits Service are largely aware of the choices implicit in their role as middle managers, and that these choices – of whether to prioritise relationships with subordinates or superordinates, and whether to act as leaders or followers – are important in the construction of Team Leader identity.

1.3 Justification for the research

The research can be justified on two grounds. From a theoretical perspective, both leadership identity and the middle management function have been the subject of considerable recent research, but with very little relating the two, a relationship this research suggests is significant. The research thus contributes to two “live” areas of management and organisational research. From a practical perspective the research offers further insight into the behaviours of middle managers and the processes which underpin these behaviours. This may increase organisational understanding of middle management roles and provide insight into apparent tensions between roles.

1.4 Methodology

The research project, and the literature which informs it, propose that leadership is a social construction. Accordingly, the research is interpretative in nature and proceeds on a subjective ontological basis. The research is primarily inductive, in that it does not set out to rigorously test a proposed theory, but seeks to build possible theory from the research findings.

The research strategy chosen is a case study because it enables “investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson 2002); that is the phenomenon of leader-follower identity, and how it manifests in the context of the Team Leader role in the LDL Benefits Service. The case study is a Single Case Holistic one (Yin 2003) and the unit of analysis is the “group of Team Leaders within the Benefit Service”. Consideration of the risks and justification of a single case study are discussed in 3.3.

The case study proceeds as a multi-method qualitative study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). The chosen methods are semi-structured interviews with seven Team Leaders and three more senior managers within the organisation; observations of the monthly Team

Leader meetings; and analysis of organisational documents such as the service Operational Plan, Team Leader Job Descriptions and minutes of meetings.

A mixture of inductive and deductive methods is used to analyse the texts. Analysis proceeds on the phenomenological assumption that the interview text represents insight into the “real” perceived experience of the interviewee, whilst recognising the effect of the interview context (King 2004a). Data is analysed by transcribing texts in full and developing categories to unitise data both from themes identified in the literature and those raised by the texts (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As new texts are analysed and further categories identified, category meanings and relationships are reviewed and refined, and previously coded texts reassessed.

1.5 Outline of chapters

The dissertation proceeds in the following way.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of relevant literature, including the literature on leadership, identity and middle management. Drawing on existing literature it proposes a conceptual model to explain and further explore middle manager role identity.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the research philosophy adopted, the choice of research strategy and methods, and justifications for all choices. It follows with a detailed description of the research procedures, including the analysis of data.

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the research in relation to the research aims following the application of the methods described in Chapter 3. It presents evidence as to how Team Leaders construct their identities and how Team Leaders negotiate and interpret their roles as both leaders and followers.

Chapter 5 reviews and interprets the findings of Chapter 4 in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2. It also proposes further refinements to the conceptual model and suggests productive areas for further research.

1.6 Definitions

A number of terms used in the research require definition:

“Leader” is defined as someone who carries out “the process of inducing others to take action towards a common goal” (Locke 1991).

“Follower” is defined as someone who accepts the role of another as “leader” and agrees to the leader exerting power over them (Lürhmann and Eberl 2007).

“Identity” is defined as “a theory or schema of an individual, describing and interrelating his or her relevant features, characteristics and experiences” (Schlenker 1984) and which is a social process arising out of relations with other individuals (Mead 1934).

“Middle manager” is used to describe any role which involves both line-managing staff and reporting to a superordinate.

“Superordinate” is used to describe the immediate line manager of an individual.

“Subordinate” is used to describe the staff whom an individual immediately line manages.

1.7 Summary

This chapter has provided an introduction to the research and its aims, justified the research on theoretical and practical grounds and provided a summary of how the research was carried out. The subsequent chapters will now describe the research and its findings in detail.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

“It’s just Eeyore,” said Piglet. “I thought your Idea was a very good Idea.”

Pooh began to feel a little more comfortable, because when you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out in the open and has other people looking at it.

A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*

2.1 Introduction

The literature on leadership is vast, but Bennis and Nanus (1997) comment that leadership is “the most studied and least understood concept of the social sciences” (p. 4) and Fiedler’s (1993) “black box” of leadership is still regularly referred to. Pondy (1978), coming from a social constructionist perspective, argues that researchers should stop trying to construct one unifying definition of leadership and look instead at the many ways in which the term is actually used by those who claim or are thought to practice leadership. Nevertheless, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) note that the continuing ambiguity surrounding the concept of leadership means that it is vital for researchers to clearly define what they themselves mean by leadership (and therefore what it is that they are actually researching). Therefore this chapter starts with a definition and review of leadership for the purposes of this research, before going on to review current thinking around leader and leader-follower identity and the middle management function. The chapter concludes by proposing a conceptual model drawn from the literature which forms the basis of the research.

2.1.1 Definition of leadership

For the purposes of this research, Locke’s (1991) definition of leadership is used:

“the process of inducing others to take action towards a common goal.”

This definition of leadership contains four key elements:

Process – leadership is considered to be a process, or a behaviour, rather than an attribute: it is something carried out at certain times (and therefore not at others) rather than being an inherent state.

Others – the leader must have people to lead. Leadership can only take place in the context of a group and concerns the relationship between the leader and the group: the group must be prepared to accept the leader as such.

Take action towards a common goal – Leadership is not simply about the relationship between the leader and the group. Leadership also implies something active, and a collective movement (a path or journey) towards something new or different. That is, leadership concerns bringing about change.

Inducing – Leadership is about bringing a group towards collective change without outright coercion. It is about using the leader’s relationship with the group to influence feelings and behaviours within the group in order to secure agreement with the common goal.

However, although this definition provides some necessary dimensions to the meaning of leadership, this research also assumes that leadership is a social construction, in that people actively interpret their own social worlds and construct their own meanings which are also social in origin (Berger and Luckmann 1966). Therefore, although this definition of leadership provides a shape against which to measure phenomena which might be considered “leadership” the research also acknowledges that the actors themselves may have other, valid definitions and interpretations of leadership which do not match this definition, and care must be taken to ensure that the definition is not used to automatically exclude anything which does not match it (Kelly 2008).

2.1.2 Current thinking on leadership

Leadership has been almost endlessly defined: Fleishman et al (1991) identify 65 different classification systems. More recently, however, some new trends have emerged which are particularly relevant to this research question and which will be returned to in more detail. First, leadership and our understanding of it is being increasingly seen as wholly contextual and dependent on the nature of the particular organisation or group, as opposed to fitting into one of a limited number of typologies (Jones and Kriflik 2006, Irby et al 2002). This links back to our definition of leadership being concerned with the particular relationship between a leader and a group. Second, increasing attention is being paid to the role of followers within leadership models – as Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2006) comment, followers are the ultimate “constituents/arbiters” of leadership but have been neglected in much of the leadership literature to date. Third, more emphasis is being placed on the leader’s development of self-knowledge. The value of leadership competences (largely derived from Skills theory) is being questioned (Bolden and Gosling 2006) and alternatives for leader development put forward, such as opportunities to discuss and reflect upon the nature and practice of the role (e.g. Simpson and Burnard 2000), 360° feedback (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006) and the development of emotional intelligence (Goleman et al 2002).

2.1.3 Who exercises leadership? Leaders and managers

A particular debate relevant to this research is that surrounding the relationship between leaders and managers. Many writers argue that leadership and management are quite different functions. Kotter (1990) suggests that the two functions represent opposing dimensions: management is about coping with complexity and providing order and consistency, while leadership is about seeking and coping with change. Zaleznik (1977) argues that managers and leaders are in fact two different types of people. However, others seek to integrate the two functions. Hannagan (2005) asserts that leadership is simply the influencing function of management when developing strategies and managing resources, while Borgelt and Falk (2007) suggest that leadership and management functions can be carried out by a range of roles, depending on the

organisational need of the time, and that individuals themselves can flex between the two functions.

A number of writers suggest that organisations need to develop “diffuse” leadership (Sheard and Kakabadse 2002), where leadership is practiced and acknowledged by many throughout the organisation, rather than being “locked in” at the top. Mintzberg (1999) refers to the danger and absurdity of locating and attributing all leadership power and ability to one individual, while others such as Cooksey (2003) and Callanan (2004) see the increasing complexity which organisations have to deal with as a driver forcing them to develop widespread leadership capacity.

A final recent development is for organisations themselves to adopt discourses of leadership for their own managers. The terms “leader” and “team leader” replace terms such as “supervisor” or even “manager” (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) and organisations may promote leadership attributes such as creating vision and strategy as necessary qualities for managers and supervisors (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003). This may lead to managers being encouraged to see themselves as leaders, but not necessarily to see their continuing managerial roles, to do with operational and control matters, as a valid part of that identity (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003, Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003).

2.2 Identity and identity construction

This research considers the construction and maintenance of identities by Team Leaders, and therefore some explanation of identity and how identity is constructed is required.

Identity can be defined as “a theory or schema of an individual, describing and interrelating his or her relevant features, characteristics and experiences” (Schlenker 1984). Identity is the way in which we define and understand ourselves as something both distinctive to others and coherent with our past experience and current situation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). Mead (1934) describes identity as a social process which arises through relations with other individuals, and proposes two distinguishable phases

which he calls “I” and “Me”. The “I” represents the core identity which is not always consciously discerned by the individual, but which is formed through and reacts to the responses of others. The “Me” represents the “organised” identity which the individual assumes during interactions with others. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) develop this into three phases which further acknowledges the interaction of the self with the environment. Self-identity (Mead’s “I”) is the self as reflexively understood by the person at any point in time. Identity Regulation comprises the effects of social practices on identity, and Identity Work concerns the process of continually forming, repairing and maintaining identity constructions: that is, the negotiation of the Self-Identity and challenges or confirmations to that identity posed by Identity Regulation. Thus Self-Identity is sustained through Identity Work and affected to greater or lesser degrees by Identity Regulation.

Two important points about identity need to be made here, which will be later considered in more detail. The first is the complex relationship between identity and the environment: identity is created and influenced through the self’s social interactions, but it can also resist challenges to self-image (London 2002) because these images are important to the individual’s self-worth (Self-Identity) (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006). The second is that identities (or at least the organised “Me”) can be multiple because of the multiple roles that we inhabit (Hill and Stephens 2005). This can lead to tensions and conflict between the wants and needs of the “I” versus what the individual thinks they should do as a result of multiple “Me”s and indeed conflicts between the multiple “Me”s (cf Bazerman et al 1998). Identity Work can only go so far in managing multiple identities: shoring up the individual’s Self-Identity can sometimes simply increase the tension between that and the other competing “Me”s (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003).

2.3 Identity and leadership

This section considers sensemaking (Weick 1995) as a means of understanding identity and the role of leadership within the organisational context. It then considers specific

identity issues arising out of the relationship between leaders and followers, and finally examines the ways in which leaders can construct, maintain and even resist identities.

2.3.1 Sensemaking – identities, leadership and the organisation

Weick (1995) describes sensemaking as “literally...the making of sense” (p. 4). It is how individuals and organisations turn a particular event or set of circumstances (from the constant “flux” of events and circumstances that are continually experienced) into a situation that is understood explicitly, and which serves as a springboard for action (Taylor and Van Every 2000). It is the way in which individuals and organisations sift through the constant streaming of experience to search for answers to two key questions: “What’s the story?” (who we are, based on past experience and dialogue with others) and “Now what?” (what should we do as “we” and where are we going?) (Weick et al 2005).

Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking is grounded in identity construction. “Depending on who I am, my definition of what is “out there” will also change” (p20). As with other studies on identity, Weick (1995) acknowledges the interrelationship between the self and the “out there”: “Whenever I define self I define ‘it’ but to define it is also to define self” (p.20). Who we think we are affects how we behave and how others see us, which in turn affects our ongoing identity (Weick et al 2005). Weick (1995) goes on to further define sensemaking as being retrospective (we only understand what has happened afterwards), enactive of sensible environments (we are not passive but contribute to our own environments), social, ongoing (sensemaking does not start or stop cleanly), focussed on and by extracted cues (simple, familiar points of reference against which people can develop a sense of what is occurring) and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (reality does not have intrinsic qualities but is based on its social applicability).

In the context of sensemaking in organisations, one interpretation of leadership is therefore helping to facilitate the process of making sense within the organisation. This is particularly relevant to the property of extracted cues or reference points: Smircich and Morgan (1982) argue that leadership is about the management of meaning and controlling

which cues will be a point of reference within the organisation. Similarly, the leader's vision (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003) or ability to tell a story about where they and their followers have come from and are going to (Gardner 1996, Rowe 2006) can also be interpreted in this way. Pye (2005) notes that leadership occupies a dual role here: the leader will (actively) shape key sensemaking reference points for others to extract meaning, but, by virtue of their prominent position, leaders are also (passively) such reference points themselves for others to extract meaning which they may be less able to control, or even be aware of.

2.3.2 Leaders and followers

Leadership studies have traditionally focussed on the leader themselves, with the role of the followers being limited to what they did or did not do as a result of the leader's action (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006). Identity construction and the framework of sensemaking draw attention to what happens *between* the leader and followers (Pye 2005), that is, the process and the relationship between the two.

Lührmann and Eberl (2007) use identity theory to interpret leader-follow relationships. Drawing on Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity they further develop a theory of identity regulation based on four phases of "identity states" of Identity Negotiation, Identity Balance, Task Interaction and Identity Conflict. In the critical phase of identity negotiation both leaders and followers need to decide whether they want to be in the relationship (as a leader or as a follower) and whether the other is who they want them to be in that relationship. The leader-follower relationship can only proceed if both parties find their own identities and that of the other(s) acceptable, at which point the leader may legitimately start to exert power over a follower (identity balance) and focus on the shared task (task interaction). However, any change in identity or identity requirements can destabilise the relationship again (identity conflict).

Lührmann and Eberl (2007) further observe that, in order to enter into an effective relationship (which is typically only partially supported by organisational hierarchy)

leaders must therefore both maintain their own self-views and also understand how their followers see them and what they expect from leaders. This can be problematic if conforming to the views of followers diverges from the leader's own self-view of being a leader (authenticity) and how the leader has acted as a leader in the past (consistency). Equally, there are limits as to how far leaders can construct new identity proposals and remain believable to followers.

2.3.3 Influences on leader identity

As previously noted, identity construction is a complex and on-going process and there are many different factors which can contribute towards it. In terms of leader identity these can include, for example, key life events (often external to the organisation) which encourage someone to view themselves as a leader (Toor and Ofori 2008), the expectations of followers (Lührmann and Eberl 2007, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006), the expectations and identity constructions of superordinates (Raes et al 2007) and the shared identity of the group or peers (Brown and Humphries 2006).

One critical influence on leader identity is that of organisational structure and discourse. First, organisational structure and job designs can “pre-structure” identity construction (Lührmann and Eberl 2007) by defining to a large extent what leaders and followers are expected to do and how they are expected to relate towards each other. That is, the organisational structure provides the members of the organisation with a means of sensemaking: it defines how the (organisational) world is, and therefore how the organisation and its members will deal with it (Mangham and Pye 1991). They provide a ready-made answer to the question “Who am I in the organisation?”

Second, organisations can actively seek to influence the identity of members (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), particularly in terms of “organisational identification” (Tompkins and Cheney 1985). This can include job titles (where, for example, “manager”, “team leader” and “principal officer” could all refer to the same role, but carry different connotations about the meaning of the role), language (for example, customers or clients?

service areas or business units?), organisational values and ethics (such as the importance of being a team player, staying late to complete a job), and training programmes (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). As previously noted, organisations may especially seek to promote a discourse of leadership which seeks to transform managers from bureaucratic functionaries to leaders and visionaries (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006). This positive re-framing of the managerial role may be very appealing to managers who are glad to reconstruct their identities as leaders (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006) but such identities may remain at odds with actual leadership ability (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006) or the continuing (managerial) requirements of the role (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003). Indeed, one consequence of this tension is that managers may create “anti-identities” or “not me” positions to refer to aspects of their role which do not fit with their more positive “visionary leader” identity (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003).

Members may also resist or reject organisational attempts at identity regulation and organisational discourses on offer (Thomas and Davies 2005). This may be because their own sense of identity and preferred interests are not reflected in the organisational discourses available: they may continue to see themselves not as leaders (or managers) but as professionals (Gleeson and Knights 2008) or may consider other identities to be paramount such as being a parent (Hill and Stephens 2005). However, Thomas and Davies (2005) suggest that this resistance is often complex and involves accommodation. In particular, individuals may take advantage of the ambiguities of organisational discourse and present the “self as maverick”, where they construct themselves as being “outside” the organisational discourse and able to challenge and re-write meaning around what is really going on and what is really required of the role.

2.4 The middle manager function

Increasingly, research is focussing on the predicament of the manager “caught in the middle” (Gabel 2002). Gabel (2002) argues that much of the leadership literature is misleading, in giving the impression that managers and leaders are always in charge and

can make decisions as they see fit; in fact they are typically subject to a variety of influences including supervisory ones. Jones and Kriflik (2006) note that as well as having to negotiate top-down pressures, middle managers and supervisors also have to negotiate the bottom-up pressures of their subordinates, and their needs and expectations, which may be in conflict with those of the manager's superordinates. Indeed, subordinates expect their managers to show "genuine concern" for them (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006), by protecting them from the excessive demands of senior managers and "unleashing" them from the restrictions created by the organisation (Jones and Kriflick 2006).

The middle manager therefore has to manage "nearby leadership" (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006) where leaders and followers necessarily work closely together (Gleeson and Knights 2008), probably in the same team and space, where leaders have to also work closely with, and aim to develop relationships with stakeholders, including superordinates (Gabel 2002) and where tensions between leader and follower expectations need to be intimately negotiated.

The middle manager role is also expanding in terms of organisational expectation. McConville (2006) notes how organisations are increasingly devolving responsibilities such as HR functions to middle managers. Pedersen and Hartley (2008) suggest that the public sector Third Way has created a new set of tensions for public sector managers, in which managers are expected to innovate, respond to local need and work in partnership to deliver cross-cutting services, yet are also constrained by increasingly prescriptive national standards, consequences of failure and accountability for that failure. Again, discourses of leadership lie in tension with expectations of tight managerial control.

2.5 Team Leader Identity – leader and follower

The role of the middle manager or supervisor in organisations highlights a critical gap in the literature on leadership and leader identity. On the one hand the differing identity

needs and constructions of leaders and followers are acknowledged. On the other hand, middle managers represent the reality for the majority of leaders, in that they are simultaneously leaders *and* followers. How, then, do managers construct their own leader-identities with their subordinates, in the context of also being (as a follower) part of the construction of their superordinate's own leader-identity (and of course in the wider organisational context)? The nature of leader and leader-follower identity construction is still more complex than the literature suggests, because the majority of managers have to engage in both sides of the construction process simultaneously. Furthermore, the leader's immediate superordinate may also have a relationship with the leader's subordinates (Sheard and Kakabadse 2002) or construct their own images of the leader as a subordinate which is part of their own identity construction as a leader (Raes et al 2007).

The aim of this research project is therefore to carry out a case study of a specific middle manager/supervisor (Team Leader) role in the context of the organisation in which they work. The research aims to identify the nature of Team Leader identities, and whether there is any collective identity; how the Team Leader role is understood and described by their line managers and the organization (the organizational discourse); and how Team Leader identities are constructed, where influences could include the self, subordinates, superordinates and peers. The research will particularly examine how Team Leader identities interpret and relate to the various potential roles suggested by their position between subordinates and superordinates.

2.6 Conceptual model – position, identity and role

The various factors known to influence (leader) identity as described under section 2.3.3 map very closely with the organisational position of middle managers as described by Gabel (2002). This can be expressed diagrammatically in figure 1:

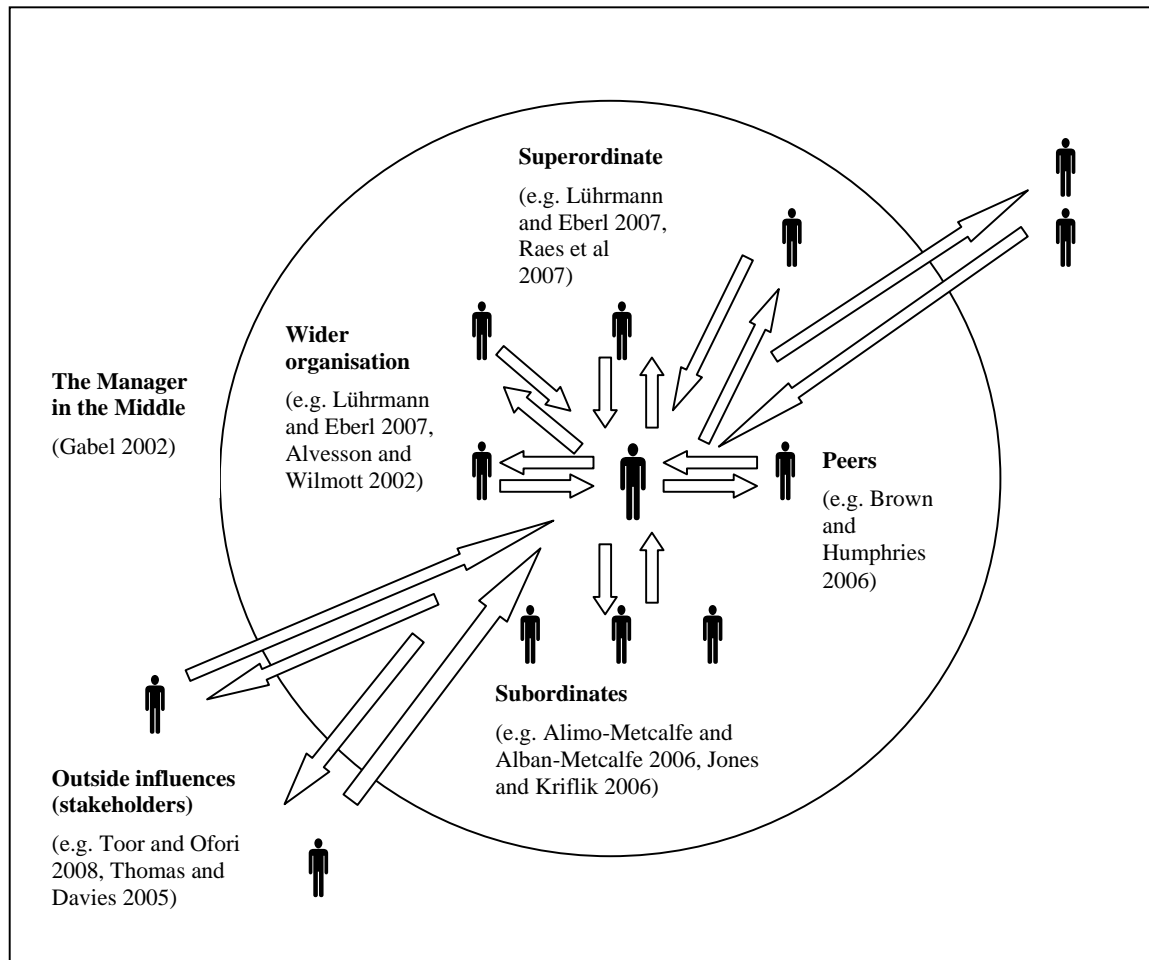


Figure 1 – the middle manager position and influences on leader identity

The map therefore describes a set of relationships for middle managers within (and outside) an organisation. These relationships will provide Identity Regulation for the Self-Identity of the middle manager (Alvesson and Willmott 2002). It is proposed that this map can be further extended to describe possible interpretations of the position of the middle manager depending on whether and how these relationships affect the Identity Work of the Middle Manager. These broad interpretations (which are not necessarily exclusive but describe preferred or common behaviour) can be described as follows:

Passive leadership (figure 2) – here the role of the middle manager as leader is to act as the vicarious arm of the superordinate, carrying out his/her wishes and “making it happen” (Raes et al 2007). The dominant role is that of the follower and the key relationship is with the superordinate: the middle manager accepts the role of follower in full (Lührmann and Eberl 2007) and accepts the superordinate as a reference point for their own identity and their place in the organisation (Pye 2005).

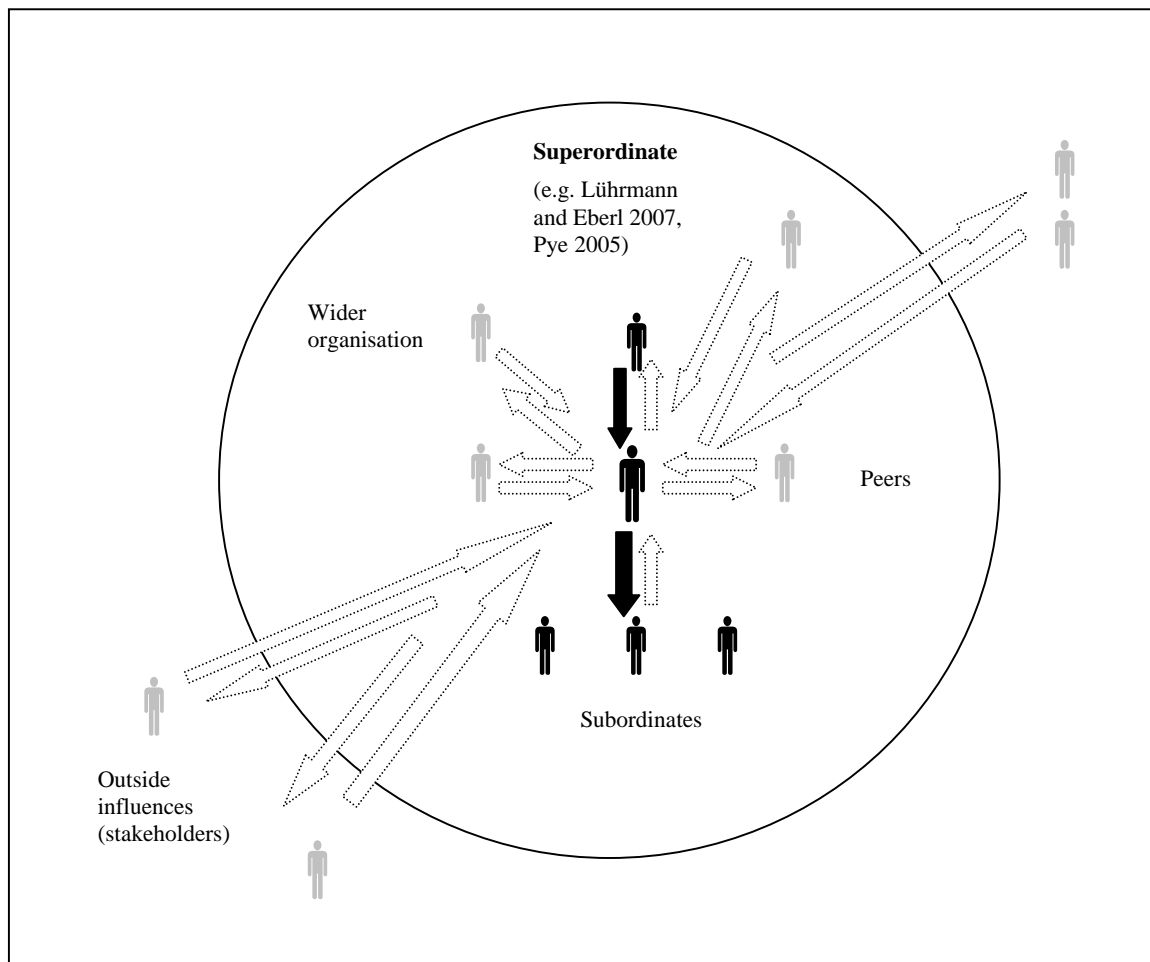


Figure 2 – The Passive Leadership role

Active leadership (figure 3) – in this role the middle manager acts as a junior, but wholly involved member of the wider management team. S/he is involved in decisions and shares responsibility for them when managing his/her subordinates. Thus although their role remains in some senses that of a follower, the middle manager acts in many ways as a leader, both within their own delineated areas of responsibility and in contributing to the wider management team (Lee-Davies et al 2007, Sheard and Kakabadse 2002). The key relationship is with the superordinate: the middle manager looks to the superordinate as a reference point (Pye 2005) but is also likely to find reference to their own identity in the wider organisational discourse and structure (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Lührmann and Eberl 2007).

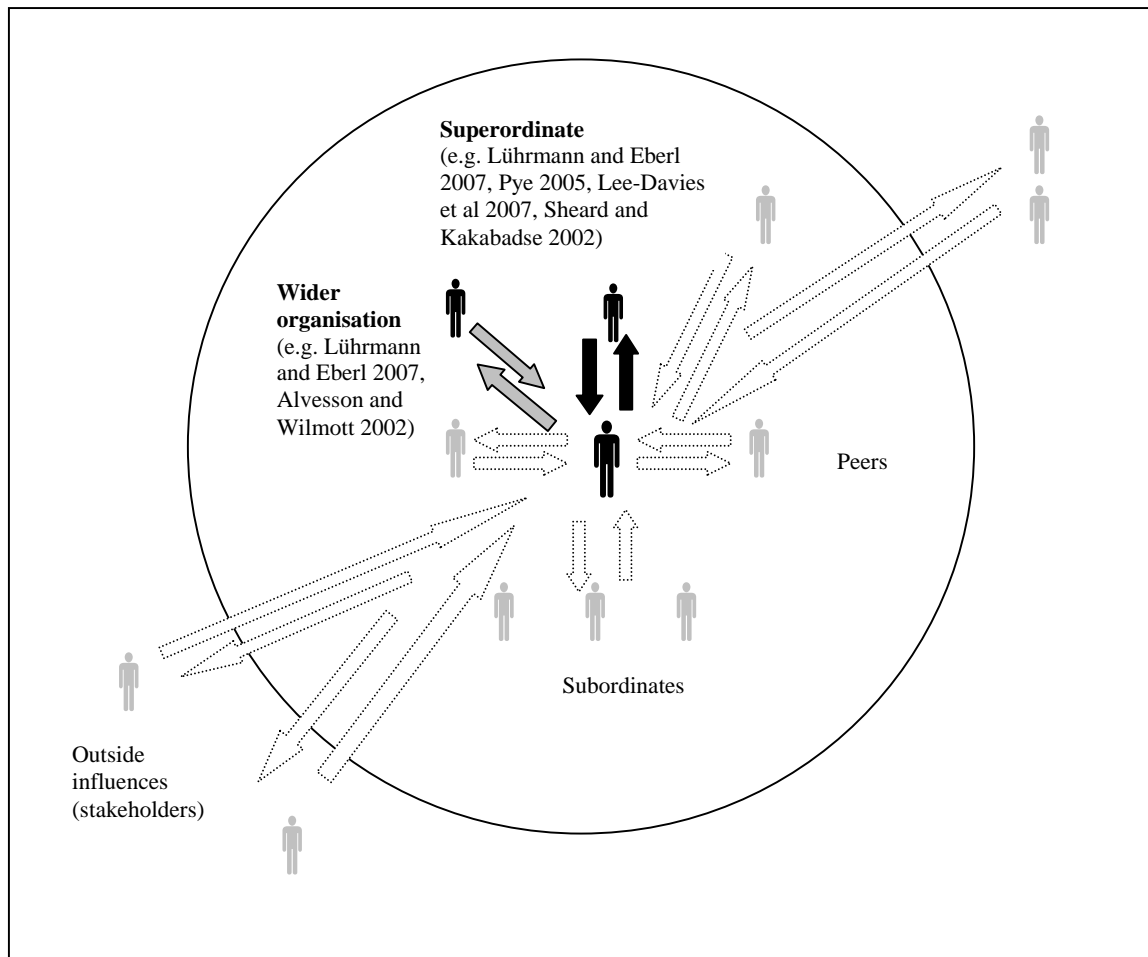


Figure 3 – the Active Leadership role

Defensive leadership (figure 4) – the middle manager acts as a shop steward figure, representing the concerns and needs of the subordinates upwards and trying to protect the subordinates from superordinate demands (e.g. Jones and Kriflik 2006). The dominant role is that of leader and the key relationship is with subordinates: the middle manager accepts the expectations of subordinates (Jones and Kriflik 2006, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006) and accepts the leader role in relation to them (Lührmann and Eberl 2007).

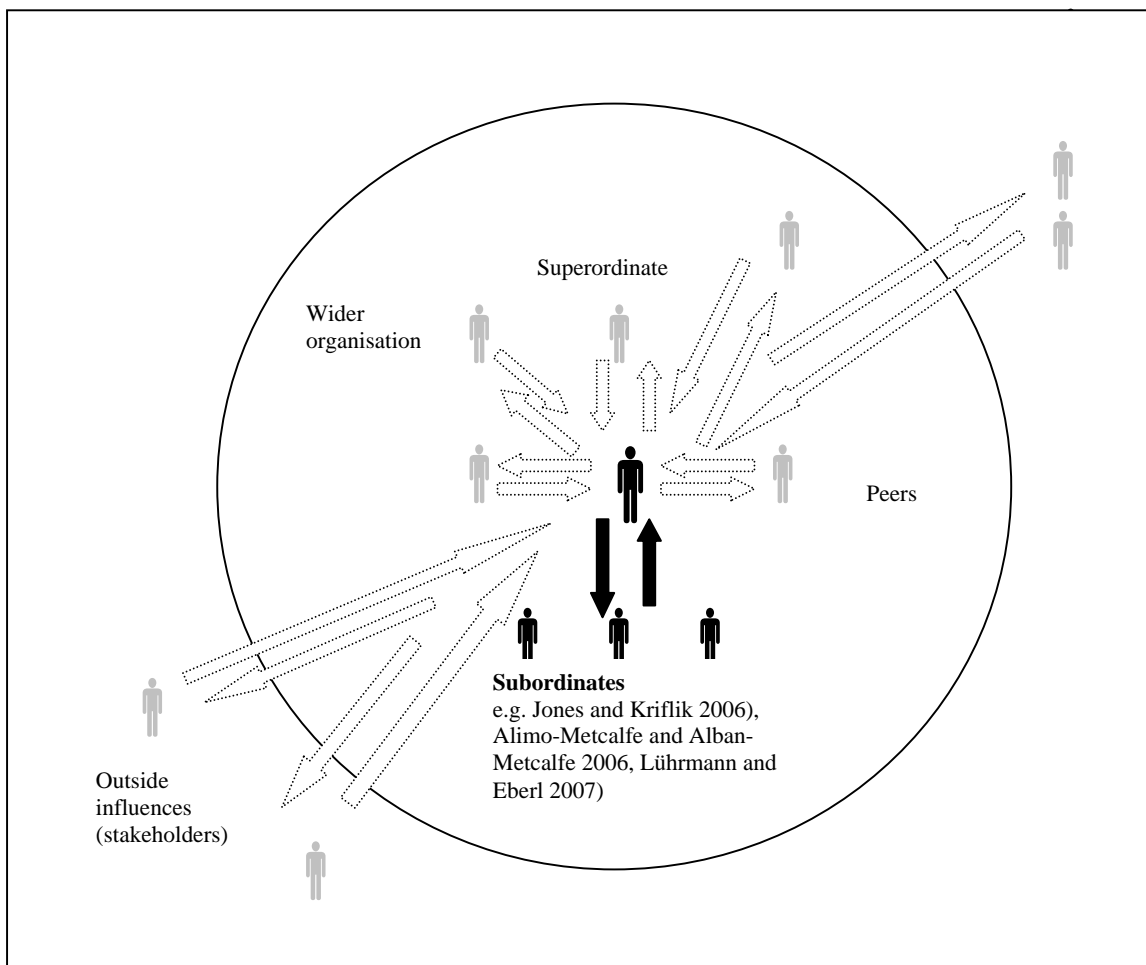


Figure 4 – the Defensive Leadership role

Resistance leadership (figure 5) – a fourth possible role is that of the “Maverick” (Thomas and Davies 2005). Here the middle manager sees themselves as operating (or trying to operate) outside their prescribed role and creating their own meaning. The key relationship may be various: it could include outside relationships and peer relationships as described by Thomas and Davies (2005) and Brown and Humphries (2006) but it could also be with subordinates, where the manager constructs themselves as something other than a leader in relationship to them, such as a (professional) expert (Thomas and Davies 2005).

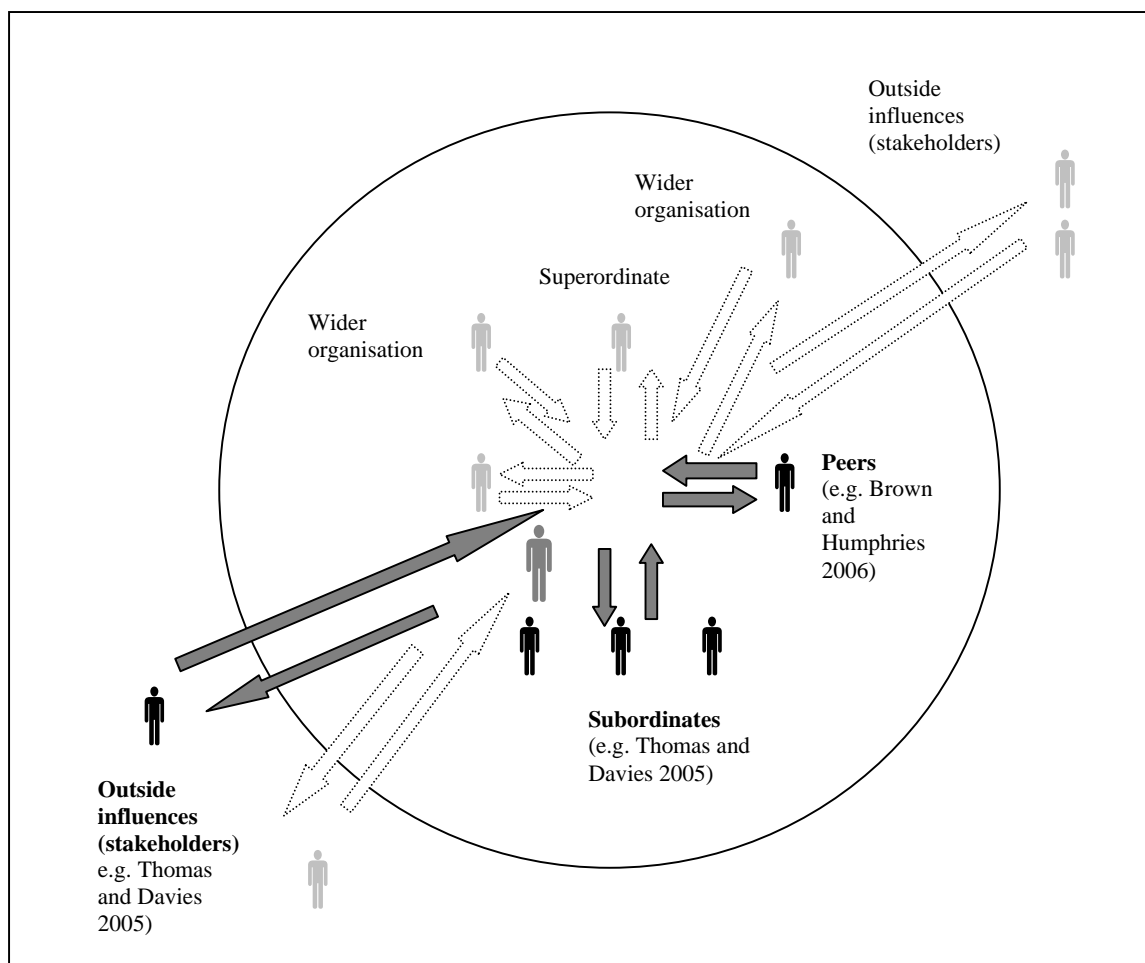


Figure 5 – the Resistance Leadership role

These four role types can be summarised in the following matrix (figure 6):

| | | Key Relationship | |
|-----------------|----------|------------------------------|--|
| | | Superordinate | Subordinate |
| Key Role | Follower | <i>Passive Leader</i> | <i>Resistance (Maverick) Leader</i> |
| | Leader | <i>Active Leader</i> | <i>Defensive Leader</i> |

Figure 6 – The Middle Manager Role matrix

Mapping these possible role types provides a framework through which to examine and interpret the experience of managers who have to construct their identities “from the middle”. The Middle Manager Role Matrix proposes that the varying manager behaviours found in the literature can be categorised as four broad roles (Passive, Active, Defensive and Resistance Leadership) and that these roles can be interpreted within the context of the key choices faced by middle managers: whether to act primarily as leaders or followers, and whether to prioritise their relationship with their subordinates or their superordinates. It is therefore proposed that these choices form part of the identity construction of middle managers, as significant identity regulators on the middle manager’s self-identity.

2.7 Summary

This chapter outlines contemporary thinking on leadership, identity, leader and follower identity construction and the middle management function, and argues that the literature to date has failed to sufficiently examine the implications of leader and follower identity construction in the context of the middle manager who may be both leader and follower. It develops a conceptual model which, while drawing on current research, also proposes a framework in which to interpret the choices implicit in the middle manager function, and the ways in which middle managers themselves interpret their position and construct their identities. The next chapter therefore discusses the research methods which test the conceptual model and its proposals in relation to middle manager identity construction.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

“Cheshire-Puss,” [Alice] began... “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the cat.

Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland

3.1 Introduction

Unlike the Cheshire Cat, who thought that the destination was what mattered, the researcher is as much concerned with the process of getting there as what might be found at the end. In particular, the researcher’s philosophical assumptions about the world and reality, and our ability to understand it, will underpin and influence the choice of research strategies, methods and procedures (Saunders et al 2007) and are essential to understanding the researcher’s approach (as well as their description of the destination). This chapter therefore starts by describing the philosophical stance adopted by the researcher, and goes on to discuss the chosen research strategy and choice of methods, and their appropriateness to the research philosophy. The chapter then provides a detailed description of the research procedures, and concludes with an examination of ethical considerations and how these were mitigated.

3.2 Research philosophy, axiology and approach

3.2.1 Research philosophy

The epistemological basis for this research project is interpretative. That is, the research will not assume that all reality is observable, but that reality is also constructed between humans in their role as social actors. The main objective of the research, therefore, will be to explore the ways in which Team Leaders and other members of the organisation make sense of their world, through their perceptions of their own social roles and the

roles of others. Similarly, the research proceeds from a subjective ontological basis. Leadership is not presumed to have an objective existence external to social actors, but is a social construction based on the perceptions, meanings and actions of those social actors. Thus the phenomenon of leadership may have different meanings to different social actors.

3.2.2 Axiology

Heron (1996) suggests that, as well as outlining the broad philosophical foundations of the research, the researcher should also be able to articulate their own values and judgements which they not only bring to the choice of research topic and methods, but will also apply throughout the research process. This is particularly significant for this research project because it is being conducted within my own organisation, and its subjects include colleagues with whom I work. The ethical considerations arising from this are further dealt with in section 3.5; here I describe the two main ways in which I have attempted to make my own value base explicit.

First, my main motivation derives from a personal interest in the organisation as a social entity and our role as social actors within them. If there is to be any wider organisational benefit or application, it will be in sharing interpretations of the Team Leader role, and in increasing organisational understanding of Team Leader and other behaviours, and of any particular tensions within the role. In this organisational context, my research position may be summarised as Burrell and Morgan's (1979) Interpretative position, in which the researcher's purpose is not to achieve (or recommend) significant changes, but to better understand and explain what is going on now.

Second, throughout the research process I have maintained a personal learning journal. This has enabled me not only to review research activities undertaken, their effectiveness and ways of improving methods, techniques and tools, but also to reflexively review my own active part in the research process (King 2004) and the ways in which my values may have shaped or affected the research process and interpretation of findings.

Representative excerpts are included in Appendix 2. Given that an interpretivist, subjectivist approach acknowledges that research can never be objective and value-free, this technique enables a better understanding of the personal value context in which the research was carried out.

3.2.3 Research approach

The research is primarily inductive in approach. It does not set out to rigorously test a proposed theory, but seeks to build possible theory from the research findings. The approach is not purely inductive, as it draws upon a pre-defined conceptual model (section 2.6) which itself draws upon existing theory about leadership, identity and the middle manager role. However, the conceptual model is mainly used as a framework in order to provide some necessary dimensions to the research topic and is not intended to be prescriptive: the research design deliberately maintains a flexibility to enable new theory to develop.

3.3 Research strategy

The chosen research strategy is a case study. Robson (2002) describes a case study as an “investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence”; here the phenomenon is that of leader-follower identity, and how it manifests in the context of the Team Leader role in the LDL Benefits Service. Hartley (2004) argues that understanding of the context is what particularly sets a case study apart as a research strategy: it enables a detailed examination of the interaction between the phenomenon and its context, and an understanding of processes as they happen (that is, questions of how and why, rather than what and how much). Case studies also tend to be inductive (Hartley 2004) because the piecing together of varied and detailed evidence supports theory development. A case study is therefore a highly appropriate way of examining a phenomenon such as leader-follower identity because, as described in Chapter 2, identity and identity construction are interdependent with the

environment(s) – the context – with which the individual interacts. Context is therefore critical in understanding the phenomenon at all.

The case study is a Single Case Holistic one (Yin 2003) and the unit of analysis is the “group of Team Leaders within the Benefit Service”. That is, the research does not compare one individual team leader with another (embedded case study), but focuses on the collective Team Leader role and how it operates and is understood in the Benefits Service. Similarly, the Team Leader role in the Benefits Service is not compared with similar roles elsewhere in LDL within this research.

Potential risks have been identified in carrying out single case studies. Yin (2003) warns that single case studies are potentially vulnerable to the charge that they are less valid than multiple-design ones, because there is no opportunity for analysis through contrast or replication. The single case study (and the researcher) may also be suspected of being incapable of replication, for example because the researcher had special access to a key informant (Yin 2003).

Nevertheless, there are also positive justifications for a single case design. The main justification rests on the fact that the case study is not capable of statistical generalisation (Yin 2003) because it lacks representativeness by its very nature (Fisher 2007) and because it would not be possible to carry out enough case studies to support proper statistical generalisation (Gomm et al 2000). Rather, the strength of a case study is its ability to facilitate understanding of processes as they occur in context, and it is this understanding that enables theoretical propositions to be developed about whether and how these particular processes may influence behaviours and actions in other contexts (Hartley 2004). Indeed, Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggest that it might not be appropriate to expect to be able to repeat findings because the context in which they were collected may be complex and dynamic and subject to change. The key, therefore, in demonstrating the validity of the research, is not necessarily carrying out research that is replicable, but in describing the research in such a way that the reader can clearly understand the decisions and steps taken and the methods used to collect the data, and so

that another researcher could interrogate and re-analyse the data collected (Marshall and Rossman 1999).

3.3.1 Choice of research methods

The case study is carried out as a multi-method qualitative study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003); that is, it uses a variety of research methods which are all qualitative. The chosen methods are semi-structured interviews with a number of Team Leaders and a small number of more senior managers within the organisation; observations of the monthly Team Leader Service Area Review (SARs) meetings; and analysis of organisational documents such as the service Operational Plan, Team Leader Job Descriptions and minutes of meetings.

A multi-method approach is used for two reasons. First, gathering data from different sources and through different methods increases opportunities for gaining a fuller understanding of the context of the phenomenon being studied (Hartley 2004). Second, using multiple methods enables the triangulation of data (Yin 2003) where data from one source can be compared and tested against another, which may strengthen any conclusions drawn from it.

The nature of the phenomenon being studied, leader-follower identity, and the philosophical position adopted which assumes such phenomena to be social constructions, strongly supports the use of qualitative methods over quantitative ones. In particular it is assumed that actual leader-follower identity construction may be far more complex than any conceptual model would allow, and interviews are used as the primary research method in order to enable participants to describe in their own words their experiences of being Team Leaders. A semi-structured design uses broad questions which introduce the themes of the research, but which allow the participant considerable scope to answer the question in their own way, and provides the flexibility to accommodate and pursue new directions opened up by the participant's insights. The method of semi-structured interview, and analysis of the subsequent text, also enables

testing of the validity of the conceptual model of leader-follower role interpretation, without it being explicitly introduced in the interview, thus reducing the risk of pre-conditioning answers (Saunders et al 2007). Although quantitative methods would enabled a larger number of participants to be included, the need to more closely define questions would considerably reduce the benefits of gaining new and more finely gradated insights.

Grounded theory method is rejected with regret because the time and size constraints on this particular research project do not support the necessary process of theory building and theory testing from multiple rounds of interviews or observations (Länsisalmi et al 2004). However, the relative lack of explicit literature on the subject of leader-follower role identity and the ability of grounded theory to uncover phenomena and processes (Länsisalmi et al 2004) would make it an ideal method for larger scale research on the subject.

A mixture of inductive and deductive methods is used to analyse the texts. Analysis proceeds on the phenomenological assumption that the interview text represents insight into the “real” perceived experience of the interviewee, whilst recognising the effect of the interview context (King 2004a). The interviews are not sufficiently structured to support template analysis (King 2004b) or data matrices (Naden and Cassell 2004) and so analysis proceeds by identifying broad themes based on the research aims and literature, and identifying codes from the text where such themes were addressed. As new texts are analysed and further codes identified, the texts previously coded are reassessed for the applicability of new codes.

3.3.2 Limitations of research methods

As noted previously, the main limitations imposed on the research are time and size. Any case study is likely to benefit from researching multiple as opposed to single case studies. Similarly, further insight may be possible by using grounded theory method. However,

justification has been provided to demonstrate the validity of carrying out the research within these limitations.

3.4 Research design

3.4.1 Construction of research instruments

The semi-structured interview questions are based on the conceptual model and the supporting literature, particularly the Identity model of Alvesson and Wilmott (2002). Consideration is also given to the management of the interview itself, for example by starting with relatively straightforward questions to “warm up” the interviewee (King 2004a) and ensuring that the questions follow a logical and coherent order. However, although the conceptual model is clearly crucial in determining the nature and structuring the interview, direct reference to the model and the nature of the proposed Middle Manager Role matrix is avoided. This minimises any possible interviewer bias during the interview and avoids pre-conditioning interviewee responses. Questions are phrased in such a way that are not be demeaning to any participant, and enable participants to answer the questions in general terms rather than with specific reference to individual subordinates or superordinates (Sekaran 2003). Appendix 2 tabulates the final interview questions and the theoretical and practical basis for each one.

In keeping with a semi-structured format, the formal questions asked of all interviewees are broad, to maximise the opportunities for interviewees to offer their own perspective on the themes. Follow-up questions are therefore also included for each question, to enable the researcher to prompt or to clarify the question or further explore the theme.

Interview questions for Principal Service Managers and Senior Managers are necessarily slightly different to the Team Leader questions, but correlate as closely as possible. The same procedure of developing questions based on the research aims, conceptual model, supporting literature and practical considerations applies.

A clear interview protocol (3.5.1 and Appendix 2) supports the interview process to ensure the effective, accurate and ethical application of the research instruments. This serves several purposes, including ensuring that interviewees feel under no compulsion to participate, provides interviewees with information about the interview and themes it addresses, enabling them to prepare in advance, and ensures that interviewees are clear as to the nature of the research and consequences of their participation.

3.4.2 Validity, reliability and triangulation

Robson (2002) identifies potential threats to data reliability and data validity. Subject bias is reduced through the interview protocol by emphasising the fact that the research has no organisational purpose and that results remain anonymous, and by minimising reference to the conceptual model. Observer (researcher) bias is reduced by digitally recording and transcribing interviews, and observer error addressed partially by the use of pre-planned follow-up questions and partially (because the semi-structured nature means that not all interviews proceed in exactly the same way) by the researcher reviewing the interviews afterwards and personally reflecting on their conduct in a Personal Learning Journal (see Appendix 2 for a relevant excerpt here).

The main method of maximising data validity is through triangulation with other data sources. Interviewing seven Team Leaders from across the service reduces the effect of any bias during any one interview. Attendance at Service Area Review (SARs) meetings to observe Team Leaders interacting with each other and with the wider organisation enables testing of Team Leader perceptions in those areas. Similarly, a wide variety of data sources in relation to organisational discourses are used, including interviews with two Principal Service Managers (immediate superordinates of Team Leaders) and Senior Manager, and analysis of organisational documents.

3.5 Research Procedures

This section describes how the research instruments were actually administered during the course of this particular research project.

3.5.1 Administration of research instruments

Interviews

The interview questions, and their order, were revised and refined a number of times, in order to ensure that they were clear, precise and unbiased. This included seeking peer review. Finally a pilot interview was carried out with a Team Leader to test both the questions and the interview protocol. This led to some minor changes to the interview questions and some amendments to the protocol, particularly around the content of the follow-up email, as it was identified that participants may not always read the (attached) information sheet. However, the pilot interview was fundamentally successful and the data collected was included in the research.

Interviews were conducted over a period of eight weeks from the pilot interview in early February 2009 to the final one in early April 2009. The scheduling of interviews was in part dictated by the availability of participants, but care was also taken not to undertake more than two interviews in any week, to enable each interview to be reviewed and transcribed before the next one. Interviews were all held at the participant's place of work, in a private, pre-booked meeting room. Interviews were planned to take up to one hour but the rooms were booked for an hour and a half to allow for slippage.

Team Leader participants were initially chosen by picking representatives from each function area (Appendix 1), and then by ensuring that there was a balance of genders. It was initially planned to carry out six interviews with Team Leaders, but as the pilot interview was very successful this was also included, making seven. Personal knowledge of knowledge Team Leader movements between functions and managers, and length

service was also utilised to maximise experiences across the service and to make the Team Leaders interviewed as representative as possible. Care was also taken to avoid interviewing Team Leaders known to be close to each other, or related. All Team Leaders finally short-listed asked agreed to participate.

Principal Service Manager and Senior Manager participants were chosen based on a spread across the Claim Processing and Compliance functions, and with representation of both genders. Two Principal Service Managers and one Senior Officer were chosen. All agreed to participate on being asked.

Interview protocol

Interviewees were initially invited to participate verbally. When provisional verbal consent was given they were sent a follow-up email which summarised the nature and purpose of the research, and the themes that the interview would be addressing. At this stage participants were also sent an information sheet which provided detailed information about the purpose and aims of the research, what the data collected would be used for, and how it would be collected, stored and reported. The information sheet also emphasised the right to withdraw at any point or to not answer any question, the right not to have the interview recorded using a digital voice recorder, the fact that all data collected would be kept securely and confidentially, and that no data collected would be attributable to any individual. See Appendix 2 for copies of the follow-up email and information sheet.

Interview participants were invited to choose an appropriate and convenient time for the interview. The follow-up email confirmed the likely length of time needed for the interview, but the participant's availability for that length of time was also checked at the beginning of the interview (Zikmund 2000).

Before each interview proceeded the interviewee was asked to confirm that they had been able to read and understand the information sheet, given the opportunity to ask questions,

and asked whether they agreed to having the interview recorded digitally. The interviewee was invited to sign a consent form (Appendix 2) to confirm that they were happy to proceed.

Observations

A Service Area Review meeting was observed on 18 March 2009. It had been planned to attend at least two and ideally three meetings to mitigate any risk of reactivity (Bryman 1988). However, this was not possible for a combination of reasons: meetings before Easter were not practical to attend because the available rooms were small and not conducive to additional attendees; meetings were cancelled over the Easter period because of holidays; and researcher availability precluded attendance at subsequently scheduled meetings.

Documentary analysis

Documents were sourced, obtained and analysed over a ten week period between early February 2009 and late April 2009.

3.5.2 Analysis of data

All interview participants agreed to have the interviews digitally recorded. All interviews were therefore transcribed in full by the researcher, which provided an opportunity to review the conduct of the interview in detail, and to start an initial analysis of findings. It also meant that any non-verbal indicators could be noted. Observations of the SAR meeting were hand-noted at the time and then written up immediately afterwards.

All data processing and storage procedures were carried out in compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998). All data collected was securely stored away from the organisation. Personal details were held separately to the data and linked by code. Digitally recorded data was transcribed in full, and then securely destroyed, with

transcripts securely retained only for the duration of the research project and its formal assessment. No sensitive personal data was collected.

All interview text was transcribed into MS Excel format. This meant that, having coded the text, the data filtering facility enabled the easy identification of both particular codes and the associated text, and made analysis considerably easier.

Categories to unitise the data were initially generated both from themes identified in the literature and those raised by the texts (Strauss and Corbin 1998). A coding structure was devised to support the filtering of codes in MS Excel. As more interview texts were coded, the codes were refined, and previously coded texts were reviewed and re-coded to include new codes where applicable. Similarly, the development of new codes also led to the refinement of the coding structure. Sometimes the same text related to different codes, and the Copy and Paste function was used to repeat the differently coded text. Text from the interview observations and documents were then coded in the same way. Appendix 3 shows the final coding structure.

Once the coding structure was completed analysis was carried out in two ways. First, references to each code were identified through MS Excel filtering and tabulated, to provide a visual representation of which texts referred to themes and to what degree. Relevant tables are presented under 4.3.1 to 4.3.3. Second, the coding structure was used as a template in which to capture relevant text for each code. Adding summaries, text identification and colour coding helped to support the analysis of the texts thus collated. Representative excerpts are included in Appendix 3.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The main ethical considerations posed by this research concern the researcher in person: I am a member of the same organisation as the individuals from whom data is collected, and, in most cases, I am in a more senior position. This is partially mitigated by the fact

that I do not directly or indirectly line manage any of the participants, and that my areas of responsibility do not directly impinge upon theirs. Nor was there any specified organisational purpose to the research (as described under 3.2.2). Nevertheless, my position creates two potential risks: that individuals are pressured into taking part against their wishes or saying things that they believe to be the “right answer”; or, conversely, that individuals are reluctant to participate because they believe the data collected will be used in some other organisational context. Sections 3.4 and 3.5 describe the steps taken to minimise these risks and to ensure that all interviews were carried out in an ethical way.

Every effort was made to retain objectivity when analysing and reporting on findings. Again, the personal learning journal was an invaluable tool in identifying any potential tendency to interpret findings based on personal values or interests. Extreme care was taken to ensure not only that all data was anonymised, but that any references to individuals were also presented in such a way that they could not be identified.

The observation of the SAR meeting presented a specific ethical problem. I planned to observe in the role of “Observer as Participant” (Gill and Johnson 2002), that is, a spectator who is known to be an observing researcher. This was considered appropriate given that I would be observing work colleagues. I asked permission of the meeting Chair to attend in advance and explained the purpose of my attendance, which he agreed to, and planned to explain my presence at the beginning of the meeting. However, in the event I was not able to, and moreover the Head of Service took the opportunity of my presence to invite me to present a short report on my service area to the meeting. Some participants would therefore have thought that I was attending the meeting for a purpose other than observation.

It is judged that it was still acceptable to go ahead with the observation and to include it in the research for the following reasons. First, the Chair was aware of my real reasons, and I also took the opportunity to tell Team Leaders sitting either side of me of my real purpose: although it was not of course ideal I gauged from the reaction that they had no

objections and they may also have spoken to other colleagues. In addition I had interviewed or arranged to interview a number of the Team Leaders present. Second, the observations that made, and which were relevant to the research project, were broad and more concerned with the overall content and conduct of the meeting rather than the behaviours of participants.

3.7 Summary

In this chapter the philosophical approach to the research is outlined and the chosen research methods justified in the context of that approach. The application of research methods, including issues of validity, reliability and ethical considerations are described in such a way as to enable the reader to replicate the methods and re-interrogate the data collected. The next chapter therefore sets out the findings as a result of such application of research methods.

Chapter 4 – Findings

“You’re really not going to like it,” observed Deep Thought.

“Tell us!”

“Alright,” said Deep Thought. “The Answer to the Great Question...of Life, the Universe and Everything...is...Forty Two.”

Douglas Adams, *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline and describe the main findings following the application of the methodology described in Chapter 3, and in relation to the research aims described in Chapters 1 and 2. Interpretation and discussion of the findings will be addressed in Chapter 5.

After an introductory description of the organisation and middle manager role which formed the case study, the chapter briefly addresses the influences on Team Leader identity construction, Team Leader identities constructed and organisational discourse with respect to the Team Leader role, before considering in more detail the ways in which Team Leaders interpret their position as both leaders and followers.

4.2 Background – The Benefits Service

The Benefits Service is managed by a joint venture company, Liverpool Direct Limited (LDL) on behalf of Liverpool City Council. It comprises over 250 staff and carries out a number of functions, including the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. The case study focused on the Claim Processing and Compliance areas, which include fifteen Team Leaders responsible for different teams across the two areas. Each Team Leader reports to a Principal Service Manager, who is typically responsible for two or three Team Leaders. An organisational chart is included at Appendix 1.

A key organisational discourse reflected in the Service Operational Plan and referenced by a number of those interviewed, is how the Service has been transformed from one of the worst performing in the country to one of the best. Much of this transformation was achieved through substantial investment in technology, staff and management training and restructuring. In many ways the Service typifies a “cleaned-up bureaucracy” (Heckscher 1994), that is, an organisation which has retained tight control over both managers and staff through a combination of rules and vertical reporting, but which has also actively sought to reduce the cost and size of the hierarchy (Hale 2002), for example by using a “layer” of Principal Officers to flexibly manage a number of teams.

Another key organisational discourse is that the Service exists in, and must respond to an ever-changing environment, including legislative changes and the commercial consideration of “growing the business”. Nevertheless, in another sense the Service is relatively stable, with very low staff turnover. Indeed, all the Team Leaders interviewed had worked in the Service for at least fifteen years and five out of seven had been Team Leaders for most of that time.

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 How Team Leaders construct their identity

Table 1 summarises the sources of Identity Regulation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) on how Team Leaders construct their identities, based on coded Team Leader responses during the semi-structured interviews. See Appendix 3 for a full description of the coding. One tick indicates reference to a regulatory source; two ticks indicate substantial reference, either in volume or in weight accorded by the Team Leader. A negative tick indicates rejection of the (perceived) Identity Regulation.

| Regulatory Source | TL-A | TL-B | TL-C | TL-D | TL-E | TL-F | TL-G |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|------|
| Subordinates | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Superordinates | ✓ | – ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | – ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Peers | ✓ | ✓ | | – ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Organisation | ✓ | – ✓ | ✓ | – ✓ | – ✓ | – – ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Role | | | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Other | | | ✓✓ | | | | |

Table 1 – Identity regulation of Team Leader identity

Table 1 illustrates how Team Leaders draw on, and are subject to a wide variety of regulatory sources when constructing their identities. Within each regulatory source a still more complex picture emerges.

Subordinates

Subordinates are found to largely regulate Team Leader identity by the expectation that Team Leaders will be there for them as an expert reference point, a problem solver and to “*fight their corner*” (Team Leader D). For Team Leaders B and G the expectations of subordinates do not always match their own role meanings and, particularly in the case of Team Leader G, force them into a role that they do not agree with. For Team Leaders C, D, E and F subordinate expectations were accepted, and in the cases of C and F, very positively.

Superordinates

Team Leaders A and D describe the importance of role models in identifying how they should act and behave as Team Leaders. Team Leaders C, F and G all refer to close working relationships with their superordinates; C described a clear mutual understanding and agreement between them and the superordinate as to the Team Leader role. Team

Leaders B and E do not accept some of their superordinate expectations, although they conform to them.

Peers

Perhaps surprisingly, given the length of service of most of the interviewees, peer identity regulation is not prominent. Indeed, the strongest advocate of the importance of peer identity is Team Leader G, who states they miss it because their role isolates them. Many Team Leaders suggest that functional (including vertical) relationships are stronger than horizontal (peer) ones. Team Leaders B, C and D refer to tensions between Team Leaders, including how some Team Leaders are perceived as behaving “*above themselves*” (Team Leader B).

Organisation

Responses to perceived organisational discourses on the Team Leader role are mixed. Team Leader G identifies a very positive discourse, where the Team Leader role is being recognised for its importance, and Team Leaders “*supported and empowered*” to carry out their “*true [more strategic] role*”. Conversely Team Leader F rejects the perceived organisational discourse that Team Leaders do not need extensive experience and expertise in Benefits to carry out the role, describing it as “*disrespect[ing]*” the existing Team Leaders. Team Leader B suggests that the organisational expectation of performance management is unrealistic in addition to the role of being there for staff and Team Leader E similarly questions the expectation to “*take a step back*” and manage when casework needs doing. Team Leader D clearly describes their role as an active, decision-making manager, but states that the organisation does not recognise Team Leaders as managers.

Role

Many Team Leaders draw their identity explicitly from their role as they practise it. Team Leaders C and F both refer to the busyness of their role as they experience it, and see it as the proper interpretation of the role:

“I think a proper Team Leader probably doesn't have their backside on a chair for more than ten minutes at a time.” (Team Leader F)

However, Team Leader G suggests that the same busyness is an obstacle to their real role:

“When you're fire fighting every day you can't see the wood for the trees, can you?”

Team Leader E draws on their role as an Expert within the organisation, while Team Leader D draw on their position between subordinates and superordinates, managing information flow and representing both sides to the other.

Other

Team Leader C states that their primary identity is as a parent. This means that in one sense they would do any job that enabled them to carry out their parental role, but the parent role also colours their identity as a Team Leader:

“It's a bit like a [parent], to be honest. I'm there to develop my kids, to bring them up, bring the best out of them, and I feel like that with the team.”

4.3.2 Team Leader identity

Table 2 summarises the meanings of the Team Leader role (self-identity – Alvesson and Willmott 2002) based on coded responses from semi-structured interviews with Team Leaders. See Appendix 3 for a full description of the coding. One tick indicates reference to an Identity Meaning; two ticks indicate substantial reference, either in volume or in weight accorded by the Team Leader.

| Team Leader Role Meaning | TL-A | TL-B | TL-C | TL-D | TL-E | TL-F | TL-G |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| In the middle | | | | | | | |
| Buffer | | ✓✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Mediator | | | | ✓ | | | |
| Messenger | ✓✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Informer | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Supporter | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Protector | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Task-Focused | | | | | | | |
| Problem-solver | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓✓ |
| Decision maker | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Maintainer | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓ | |
| Implementer | | | | | | | |
| Deliverer | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Controller | | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Enforcer | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Ideas generator | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| Consultant | | | ✓ | | | | |
| Strategic planner | | | | ✓ | | | |
| People-focused | | | | | | | |
| Coach | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Empowerer | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |

| Team Leader Role Meaning | TL-A | TL-B | TL-C | TL-D | TL-E | TL-F | TL-G |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Motivator | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| HR/Line manager | ✓✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Performance manager | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Setting example | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓ | |
| Team development | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| Listener | | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Professional | | | | | | | |
| Expert | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |

Table 2 – Team Leader self-identity

The range of roles identified from the interview texts confirms the variety and complexity of the Team Leader role, and therefore the potential for differing interpretations of it.

In the middle

All the Team Leaders with the exception of E make reference to their position between subordinates and superordinates and managing information and relationships between the two. Team Leader D describes their role as necessarily and actively bridging the gap, sharing information and creating alignment. Team Leaders A and G place more emphasis on representing the organisation to the team, while B, C and F place more emphasis on the subordinate side. Team Leaders B, D, F and especially G refer to a “buffer” role in which the Team Leader absorbs, and does not pass on or wholly pass on information or concerns from either side: *“I soak up all the gripes and pressure”* (Team Leader G).

Task-related roles

The task-related roles most commonly referred to are the Enforcer (ensuring compliance with quality and organisational standards such as attendance), Controller (managing

resources), Deliverer (ensuring delivery of targets and outputs) and Maintainer (keeping things ticking over; supervision).

People-related roles

All Team Leaders refer to their role as a Coach of team members, and a majority refer to all other person-related roles except that of Empowerer.

Professional role

All Team Leaders refer to themselves in the role of Professional Experts, except Team Leader D. Team Leaders A, C, E and F describe their expertise as particularly important to their identity and role as Team Leaders and defining the relationship with staff:

“Within our role especially, it's the respect that you've got, knowledge of the job... [to] have the respect of your staff, to know that if they ask you a question you're going to be able to answer it, or if you don't, you know where to go and get the answer for it.” (Team Leader F)

Team Leaders A, C, E and F continue to carry out benefits casework in order to maintain expertise. Only Team Leader D refers to losing some expertise because the Team Leader role requires different skills:

“The technical side has left me to some extent, because I've been more involved with...managing people, rather than managing systems.”

4.3.3 Organisational discourse

Table 3 summarises the meanings of the Team Leader role based on coded responses from semi-structured interviews with Principal and Senior Managers, observations and minutes of Service Area Review meetings, and the organisation's Job Description and

Person Specification for the Team Leader role. See Appendix 3 for a full description of the coding. One tick indicates reference to an Identity Meaning; two ticks indicate substantial reference, either in volume or in weight accorded by the source. A negative tick means rejection of the Identity Meaning.

| Team Leader Role Meaning | PSM-A | PSM-B | SO | SARs | JD | PS |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| In the middle | | | | | | |
| Buffer | | | | | | |
| Mediator | | | | | | |
| Messenger | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | |
| Informer | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓ | | |
| Supporter | ✓✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Protector | | ✓ | | | | |
| Task-Focused | | | | | | |
| Problem-solver | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Decision maker | | | ✓✓ | | | ✓ |
| Maintainer | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Implementer | | | | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Deliverer | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Controller | ✓ | ✓✓ | | | ✓ | |
| Enforcer | ✓ | | | | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Ideas generator | ✓ | | ✓✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Consultant | ✓ | | | | | ✓ |
| Strategic planner | | | | | | |
| People-focused | | | | | | |
| Coach | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Empowerer | | ✓ | ✓✓ | | | |
| Motivator | ✓ | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| HR/Line manager | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Performance manager | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |

| Team Leader Role Meaning | PSM-A | PSM-B | SO | SARs | JD | PS |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Setting example | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Team development | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | | | ✓ |
| Listener | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| Professional | | | | | | |
| Expert | ✓✓ | ✓ | – ✓ | ✓✓ | | ✓✓ |

Table 3 – Organisational discourse on Team Leader meaning

Interviews with Principal and Senior Managers, observations and organisational texts allude to a range of organisational discourses in relation to the Team Leader role, not all of which are consistent with each other.

In the middle

Unsurprisingly there is an expectation that Team Leaders will act as supporters of and informers to superordinates and the organisation. Principal Service Manager B's reference to the Protector role is in relation to what they observe happening, rather than what they think should happen. There is no reference in any organisational discourse to either the Buffer or Mediator role.

Task-related roles

Taking the Job Description and Person Specification as one document, there is strongest agreement for the Deliverer, Controller, Problem Solver roles – which agrees with Team Leader identities – and Ideas Generator, which Team Leaders do not refer to. The Senior Manager particularly refers to generating ideas for improving processes, including challenging managers, as being a key contribution that Team Leaders should make. The Job Description places a heavy emphasis on task-related roles and service delivery: ten out of twelve points refer to managing processes or outputs as opposed to people management.

People-related roles

There is strong agreement that the Coach role is important and a majority of texts refer to the other people-related roles with the exception of the Empowerer. This is similar to Team Leader identities. The Senior Manager describes coaching as the Team Leader's main function:

“I think nowadays they're more coaches than they are supervisors or Team Leaders... I think we're looking for a different skill set now, and we're looking more about individuals being able to manage people, as opposed to manage their job.”

Professional Role

Organisational discourse differs on the question of Team Leader expertise. The Senior Manager argues that Team Leaders no longer need to retain as much technical expertise and that many Team Leaders have already become de-skilled. Principal Service Manager B states that Team Leaders need to adapt and acknowledge that while they should retain regulatory expertise they may not retain the ability to process claims. Principal Service Manager A *“totally disagree[s]”*:

“The level the Team Leader is at, they've got to have a combination of a detailed knowledge of systems and processes, plus the ability to lead and manage.”

The Person Specification requires

“Extensive knowledge of the following: Local Taxes, Housing Benefit legislation and management” and “Experience of processing Housing & Council Tax Benefit”.

4.3.4 Role identity – leaders and followers

Chapter 2 proposes that one key element in the construction of middle manager identity is the negotiation of the expectations of subordinates and superordinates, and the dual roles of leader and follower which the manager could be expected to act (2.5). Chapter 2 further proposes a Middle Manager Role Matrix, based on two dimensions: whether the primary relationship is with subordinates or the superordinate; and whether the behaviours described are primarily those of a leader or of a follower (2.6).

Textual analysis suggests that each Team Leader's interpretation of their role can be categorised according to one of the four Middle Manager matrix roles. Moreover, examples of each role are found amongst the seven Team Leaders.

Passive Leader

The Middle Manager role matrix characterises the Passive Leader role as acting as the vicarious arm of the superordinate, carrying out their wishes and “making it happen”. The dominant role is that of the follower and the key relationship is with the superordinate. This role is most clearly described by Team Leaders A and G.

Role definition

Both Team Leaders A and G make repeated reference to their role in communicating organisational messages downwards:

“You've got to make sure that all the information that you're passed to by the Principal Officer, service managers, is passed to the staff.” (Team Leader G)

Both Team Leaders locate themselves on the side of the organisation and see the organisation as supporting them. Team Leader A sees their role as being part of a wider chain of downward communication which includes the Team Leaders' superordinates:

"They [the Principal Service Managers] are there to do what I do at a higher level, and that's to ensure the consistent messages out there, the single message is out there."

Team Leader G sees themselves representing the organisation:

"You see, what you've got to be able to pass on to people is loyalty to the organisation, respect for the organisation, to make them want to be part of it, to be proud to do the job."

Role as follower

Both Team Leaders make more references to follower behaviour than leadership behaviour. Team Leader A regularly refers to carrying out instructions and ensuring consistency and compliance, and how they could be relied upon to deliver what was asked of them:

"They know that I'll do that and I'll pass on that information, I will get that job done, whatever."

Team Leader G largely describes carrying out the wishes and instructions of the superordinate who is there to "direct everything" and who needs to be kept informed about everything.

Relationship with superordinate

Team Leader G describes a close working relationship with their superordinate, and their role as carrying out the wishes of the superordinate and the organisation, whereas the team need to be persuaded of the benefits of those wishes. Team Leader A makes little specific reference either to their team or their superordinate, but their description of Principal Service Managers carrying out the same role suggests a stronger identification with superordinates.

Active Leader

The Middle Manager Role matrix characterises the Active Leader role as a junior, but acknowledged member of the wider management team, involved in decisions and sharing responsibility for them when managing his/her subordinates. The dominant role is that of leader and the key relationship is with the superordinate. The Active Leader role is most typified by Team Leader D.

Role definition

Team Leader D describes their role as “*the first point of management contact*” for the team. Unlike the Passive Leader role, Team Leader D describes creating consensus and alignment between subordinates and superordinates, particularly where there was conflict between the two positions:

“Whichever side I felt was right...I would back that side and try and bring the other side across...sometimes there can be more than one solution to the problem...I think the Team Leader would be key to resolving it really.”

Team Leader D sees themselves as a member of organisational management, with responsibility to uphold professional and organisational standards.

“Because if someone's doing something you're not happy with...by just ignoring it you're acquiescing, they've got you in their pockets so to speak... Although other staff may not say anything... they do see what goes on.”

Equally, by taking decisions to enforce organisational standards, Team Leader D expects to be backed up by the organisation in return. After a particular incident where the management of a staffing issue lead to accusations of bullying and harassment by the staff member:

“I did...email [managers]... and lay it on the line as to how I felt and that they were lacking and not backing me adequately. And I did receive assurances that they were backing me and they did believe in me.”

Role as leader

Team Leader D makes a number of references to leader-type behaviours. The Team Leader is a decision maker who earns respect by making the best possible decision given the information available and who *“devise[s] strategies to deal with workload and any up and coming problems”*. They are *“responsible for the control and direction of the team, and the ethos if you like.”* They are a figure-head and set an example for the team, both by setting and enforcing standards and by acting first, for example by having some pre-planned “ice-breaker” questions for Team Talks with the Head of Service. They have a role in creating alignment and consensus between management and staff by acknowledging conflict, by making a decision which side to initially back and by trying to persuade the other side.

Relationship with superordinate

Team Leader D felt that they would ultimately side with management because *“at the end of the day management would have the best interests of the office”*. They also expect

to receive management backing when enforcing organisational standards. However, Team Leader D primarily defines their role by its location “in the middle”, in linking and bringing together the two sides, rather than choosing one over another.

Defensive Leader

The Middle Manager Role matrix characterises the Defensive Leader role as a shop steward-type figure, representing the concerns and needs of the subordinates upwards and trying to protect subordinates from superordinate demands. The dominant role is that of leader and the key relationship is with subordinates. The Defensive Leader role is typified by Team Leaders B, C and, less clearly, F.

Role definition

Team Leader C makes the clearest statement of the Defensive Leader role. They describe themselves as the team’s “*Friend*” and later:

“My loyalty is with my staff...Because I'm there for them. It's a bit like a [parent], to be honest. I'm there to develop my kids, to bring them up, bring the best out of them, and I feel like that with the team...And if push came to shove, yes, I'd always pick my team.”

Team Leaders B and F also describe the purpose of their role as being there for the team:

“My role is the Team Leader. And I work on the team, with the team.” (Team Leader B)

The Defensive Leader is primarily concerned with defending and supporting the rights and feelings of the team. Team Leaders C describes several examples of such defending:

“‘It's not being fair on my staff’, I said, ‘I'm not having that.’”

Team Leader B repeatedly refers to the feelings and sensitivities of their team, which the Principal Service Manager is not aware of:

“[They] couldn't see that, but I can see that, because I am working with them, I know the personalities involved, I know how far you can...go with different people.”

Team Leader F describes a wider defensive perspective, where the needs of the team or the service function need to be defended in a competition within the organisation:

“You do have a Them and Us attitude...it's all a bit of a battle to make sure we get the best resources and we get the first shout on things...you're always trying to bat your own corner.” – Team Leader F

Role as leader

None of the Team Leaders make many explicit references either to leader or follower behaviours. Nevertheless, all three describe themselves in the role of defending and representing their teams, and also refer to enforcing organisational standards such as sickness, attendance and quality of work.

Relationship with subordinates

Team Leaders B and C both describe close relationships with their subordinates, but with differing internal dynamics. For Team Leader C the relationship is reciprocal: *“You know, if I give 100% I expect 100% back.”* When the team member breaches a rule it is seen as a breach of the relationship:

“And if I’m doing everything that I can for you [the team member], and then you go and disrespect me, then I’m not happy with that... You’ve pushed me into a situation that I don’t want to be in.”

For Team Leader B the relationship appears to be driven more by the expectations of the team than a positive choice on the Team Leader’s part:

“I do think people rely on you, rightly so, they expect you to be there for them, all the time...And if you say ‘Well look I’m busy, I can’t see you at the moment,’ staff...have actually taken offence at that...And it starts getting fraught, so often I stop what I’m doing, go round and get involved.”

Nevertheless Team Leader B is clear that the role means taking up the team’s concerns and problems on their behalf, even if it is sometimes perceived by superordinates as moaning.

Team Leader F offers an alternative aspect of subordinate/superordinate relationships. As well as being team-focussed, they also describe a close working relationship with their superordinate and see the superordinate as also being part of the Defensive process:

“Obviously you understand the processes that go on above you, and you probably know that there’s a few arguments going on...it may be that [Principal Service Manager] doesn’t agree with it, [they’ve] obviously been told by [senior manager] that this is the way we’re doing it. [They] might have had three or four days battle with them, but at the end of the day we’ve got to follow the line.”

All three Team Leaders describe equivocal feelings towards the requirement to represent the organisation on decisions they disagreed with. Team Leader F describes it as needing to “*toe the company line*” and Team Leader B refers to necessity: “*Whether I like it or not, and whether I think the staff are going to be happy with it or not.*” Team Leader C

could not pass on or enforce something that they did not believe in themselves: *“I’m not a very good liar.”*

Resistance Leader

The Middle Manager Role matrix characterises the Resistance Leader role as where the middle manager sees themselves operating (or trying to operate) outside their prescribed role and to create their own meaning. Key relationships may be with the subordinates where the manager constructs themselves as something other than a leader in relationship to them, such as a (professional) expert, or could be with others such as peers or with outside agents. The Resistance Leader is typified by Team Leader E, although Team Leader F also includes elements of resistance discourse.

Role definition

Team Leader E primarily defines themselves as the organisational Expert rather than as a Team Leader. This role of Expert is referred to in several different scenarios, including supporting team members, relations with other Team Leaders and challenging senior officers:

“Occasionally experience tells you that, you know, up to now you've got it wrong, you've got to get it right in future... And if that means I have to stand up and advise Principal Officers or other Team Leaders how to go about that, I'll do so.”

It is this status as Expert that gives Team Leader E satisfaction:

“I think people recognise that I am an experienced officer now...And there is a certain amount of satisfaction to know that they can come to me and I can help them.”

One characteristic of the Resistance Leader is the assumption that they know what their role requires better than the organisation. Team Leader E refers to being asked by their superordinate to behave differently, such as getting less involved in casework and holding regular team meetings. In the former case they seem comfortable in accepting that the superordinate disagreed with how they carried out the role:

“My aim is to strike [a] balance, and whether I've got that balance right at the moment is probably - well certainly [Principal Service Manager] questions it.”

In the latter, they are willing to “give them a try” but express doubts that there is any benefit.

Team Leader F also describes Resistance discourse in relation to the role of Team Leaders. Whereas the organisation is perceived to value verifiable outputs, the Team Leader's true role is far less quantifiable:

“I don't think [senior managers] really appreciate the amount of questions that we get from the staff, the level of involvement that we have in helping the teams, all the coaching...it's fine to look organised and you've done that piece of work, but I think a proper Team Leader probably doesn't have their backside on a chair for more than ten minutes at a time.”

Equally, Team Leader F strongly challenges the perception that the organisation believes someone can be trained to be a Team Leader who does not have an extensive background in Benefits:

“Just that pure decision makes me feel that they don't respect or appreciate what our actual job is.”

Follower role

Team Leader E refers to a leadership role as Team Leader, but describes their leadership style as “*laissez-faire*” and primarily a facilitative role:

“I’m like a gardener. I try to get the conditions where they can do their job...to do the amount that’s required, and the quality that’s required...I try not to interfere more than I have to, let them get on with it.”

Team Leader E also describes follower-type behaviours, especially with reference to the organisation. Where they disagree with a decision they let the team know their opinions rather than wholly supporting the decision publicly:

“It still won’t stop me trying to achieve what needs to be achieved but I will make sure I’ve had my say. And because of the way I’ve put it they [the team] are aware of what my opinion might be on any particular issue.”

As described above, Team Leader E is willing to accept direction from the superordinate regarding the way they managed the team and their time, although they do not agree with it. Where they describe defending their position – and it being essential to win the argument – is with regard to interpretation of legislation (the Expert role).

Relationship with subordinates

Team Leader E describes a close relationship with their team, who are perceived to be fellow experts, where there is as much enjoyment about working as part of a team as there is running one:

“I enjoy the fact that you’re still in touch with the people you’re working with quite closely, there’s quite close working links.”

Relationships with other Team Leaders and superordinates also tend to be on the basis of expertise, with certain people being identified as experts in certain areas:

“From a personal point of view I would tend to say there's a group of Team Leaders who - between us we can get an answer right, or I can go to them and they can come to me, and we would work well together.”

4.3.5 Role identity – organisational discourse

Interviews with Principal Service and Senior Managers, and observations of SARs suggest a variety of discourses in relation to Team Leader role interpretation.

Principal Service Manager A describes the Team Leader role in clearly Passive Leader terms:

“To me, the Team Leader does a lot of the doing, where I as a Principal Service Manager do a lot of the thinking. The Principal Service Manager will be thinking what needs to be done operationally... My role is to make sure that that is done, and I do that by working with the Team Leaders to say ‘Well this is what we're trying to achieve, this is how I think we're best achieving it.’”

This Passive Leader role was supported by the observation of the SAR meeting and minutes from it, where the main content of the meetings was concerned with passing information downwards to Team Leaders.

However, the Senior Manager argues that Team Leaders should be taking a more active and collaborative role in the Service, including being confident in making decisions, challenging working practices and taking responsibility for their service areas in which they have the most knowledge within the organisation. They suggest that one reason why they do not is because Principal Service Managers are neither developing nor trusting Team Leaders enough to draw them into a more effective leadership role. The Team

Leader Job Description also refers to a more active and collaborative role of contributing towards the development of the service, including the “*formulation, development and implementation of policy and practice.*”

Principal Service Manager B describes Team Leaders often being forced into defensive behaviours and practices by the service focus on targets and performance management. For example, if a member of the team has work returned as an error:

“They [the Team Leader] will do everything they can to get that checking memo off... Because it'll be – ‘Well that work instruction was wrong, it's not very clear - Well this goes against what you said there’ - and they're driven to getting their team accuracy rate up.”

4.4 Summary

In this chapter the main findings arising from the research methodology are summarised in relation to how Team Leaders construct their identities, the nature of Team Leader identities, organisational discourse and the applicability of the conceptual model in relation to Team Leader role interpretation. The final chapter therefore places these findings in the context of the current literature on leader-follower identity and the middle manager function.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

Granny Weatherwax looked out at the multi-layered, silvery world.

“Where am I?”

“Inside the mirror.”

[Granny] turned and a billion figures turned with her.

“When can I get out?”

“When you find the one that’s real.”

Granny looked down at herself.

“This one,” she said.

Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings set out in Chapter 4 are discussed and appropriate conclusions drawn. The chapter begins with a critical evaluation of the methodology described in Chapter 3, and the extent to which the findings, and conclusion drawn from them, may be treated as reliable and valid. The chapter then addresses the research question and aims as set out in Chapter 1, by evaluating the findings and interpreting them in the context of the existing literature discussed in Chapter 2. Finally the chapter assesses the limitations of the research and its findings, and proposes ways in which future research might further understanding of the subject of middle manager identity.

5.2 Critical evaluation of adopted methodology

The chosen research strategy was a case study in order to enable a detailed examination of the phenomenon of middle manager identity in its context (Hartley 2004); that is, Team Leaders in the LDL Benefits Service. The research methods chosen to conduct the case study were qualitative ones: semi-structured interviews with Team Leaders and members of the wider management team within the Benefits Service, observations of

Team Leader Service Area Review meetings and analysis of organisational documents relating to Team Leaders.

In terms of enabling a detailed examination of Team Leader identity the semi-structured interviews were largely successful. The prior briefing and the nature and structure of the questions enabled Team Leaders to discuss the personal meaning of their role and their interpretation of their position relatively freely and in some detail. A particular benefit of the semi-structured interviews and the careful drafting of questions was that Team Leaders talked about their role identity and interpretation without the researcher or the questions making specific reference to the conceptual model which was being explored, thus strengthening the validity of the model where Team Leader texts support it. The use of deliberately open-ended questions also meant that Team Leaders sometimes introduced new points which had not been previously considered, and which allowed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of middle manager identity and further development and refinement of the conceptual model (see 5.4).

The main weaknesses of the methodology concern what was omitted. Chapter 3 describes how only one observation of a SAR meeting was possible: further meetings would have confirmed the reliability of the observations and may have identified further data, although the one observation did correlate with the descriptions of SAR meetings provided by interviewees. The case study would have been further enhanced by still more sources of data. In particular, interviews with members of the teams Team Leaders manage would have provided further insight into another dimension of Team Leader identity, and extended observations of Team Leaders in the workplace would have enabled the testing of Team Leader descriptions of their role against their actual behaviours and activities.

5.3 Conclusions – Identity construction by Team Leaders in the LDL Benefits Service

The research aims set out in Chapter 1 are as follows:

- v. To understand contemporary thinking on leadership identity and identity construction
- vi. To understand contemporary thinking on the middle management function and “nearby leadership”
- vii. To identify how Team Leaders in LDL’s Benefits Service construct their identities in the context of organisational, subordinate and superordinate constructs
- viii. To use the case study of Team Leaders in LDL’s Benefits Service to
 - a. Draw conclusions as to how Team Leaders construct identities as both leaders and followers; and
 - b. Inform current theories and understanding of leadership identity

This section discusses the findings and draws justified conclusions in answer to each point.

5.3.1 Contemporary thinking on leadership identity and identity construction

A review of contemporary literature on leadership identity and identity construction as discussed in Chapter 2 identifies a number of key points.

First, identity construction is an on-going process: Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) identify a three-fold process in which Self-Identity (the self as reflexively understood by the person at any point) is sustained by Identity Work (the process of continually forming,

repairing and maintaining identity constructions) and affected to greater or lesser degrees by Identity Regulation (the effects of the environment and social practices on identity).

Second, much work focuses on the effects of environment (identity regulation) on identity and particularly leader identity. Much attention is paid to the effects of organisational discourse, including organisational structure and job design (Lührmann and Erbel 2007, Mangham and Pye 1991), the attempts of organisations to influence the identity of members (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002, Sveningsson and Larsson 2006) and the ways in which members may resist or re-interpret organisational discourse (Thomas and Davies 2005, Gleeson and Knights 2008), for example by seeing themselves not as leaders or managers but as professionals. Other regulatory sources found to affect identity include external sources such as key life events (Toor and Ofori 2008, Hill and Stephens 2005), the expectations of followers (Lührmann and Eberl 2007) and superordinates (Raes et al 2007) and the shared identity of peers (Brown and Humphries 2006).

Third, increasing attention is being paid to the processes and reciprocal relationships between leaders and followers (Pye 2005). Lührmann and Eberl (2007) propose that leader and follow identities are intricately linked, and that both leader and follower must decide whether they accept their identities in that relationship (as a leader or a follower) and whether they accept the identity of the other. Thus leader (and follower) identity is also a dialogue between self-views and the expectations of the other.

Fourth, theories of sensemaking (Weick 1995) suggest a wider social context for these processes, in which people individually and collectively sift through a constant “streaming” of experience to confirm identity, based on past experience, and how they should act on that identity basis in the future (Weick et al 2005). Pye (2005) links the process of sensemaking back to leadership: leaders will both actively shape key sensemaking reference points for others to extract, and are also passive reference points for others to extract meaning from.

However, the literature typically treats the leader or the leader-follower relationship in isolation; that is, assuming that individuals are either in one role or another. To date it does not sufficiently address the identity construction of individuals whose position implies both leader and follower roles, particularly in the increasing context of diffuse leadership (Sheard and Kakabadse 2002).

5.3.2 Contemporary thinking on the middle manager function

Recent studies suggest that middle managers are subject to a variety of influences and pressures (Gabel 2002), and that organisational expectations of middle managers are typically increasing, for example with the devolvment of HR functions (McConville 2006). Particular attention is being paid to the tensions experienced by middle managers in having to negotiate top-down and bottom-up expectations from superordinates and subordinates (Jones and Kriflik 2006, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006), especially in the context of “nearby leadership” (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006) where middle managers work closely with subordinates and superordinates.

Here the literature focuses on the expectations of subordinates or superordinates on the middle manager, rather than on how the middle manager negotiates the competing expectations in the context of their own identity, and the personal meaning and interpretation of their role.

5.3.3 How Team Leaders construct their identities

The research considers the sources of identity regulation (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) on Team Leader identity construction. It finds (section 4.3.1) that each Team Leader draws on, and is subject to a wide variety of regulatory sources identified in the literature including subordinates (Lührmann and Eberl 2007), superordinates (Raes et al 2007), peers (Brown and Humphries 2006), organisational discourse (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Sveningsson and Larsson 2006), the role itself (Thomas and Davies 2005, Gleeson and Knights 2008) and influences outside the organisation such as family life (Hill and

Stephens 2005). However, detailed examination of Team Leader texts also reveals that the Team Leaders often react very differently to each regulatory source. For example, some Team Leaders accept and accommodate the expectations of subordinates, whereas others express tensions between those (similar) expectations and their own interpretation of the role.

The findings thus support the wider literature in identifying identity regulatory sources. However, these studies focus on the specific effects of particular regulatory sources. This case study considers the identity construction of a number of individuals in the same organisational role, and the findings reveal how the identity construction of one individual both draws on and sometimes actively resists a range of regulatory sources, and also how a number of individuals in similar roles may react very differently to similar or the same regulatory sources. The study thus further supports Alvesson and Willmott's (2002) model of identity construction as a highly individual interrelationship between the self and regulatory sources through identity work. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) describe each element as equally important, but the case study of seven Team Leaders suggests that it may have been the individual self-identity and identity work that resulted in the differing responses to shared regulatory sources.

5.3.4 Team Leader identity

The research considers the meanings which Team Leaders ascribe to their role as Team Leaders; that is, their identity work (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) in constructing and maintaining an identity. The findings (section 4.3.2) include a number of significant points.

First, six out of seven Team Leaders make specific reference to their position between subordinates and superordinates and the need for them to manage information and relationships between the two. This supports the work by Jones and Kriffluk (2006) who find that subordinates expect middle managers to negotiate and manage their expectations versus the expectations of superordinates: the case study finds that Team Leaders in the

Benefits Service are themselves very aware of their position and the need to negotiate and manage the expectations of both subordinates and superordinates. However, the six Team Leaders describe negotiating those expectations differently, with three (B, C, F) prioritising subordinate expectations, two (A, G) prioritising superordinate/organisational expectations and one (D) seeing their role as creating alignment between the two. This role interpretation is discussed further in section 5.3.6 but at this stage the findings serve to support the conclusions from the literature review that insufficient attention has been paid to the multi-faceted role of the middle manager and its implications for leader and/or follower identity.

Second, six out of seven Team Leaders place substantial importance on their role as professional experts, with four (A, C, E, F) seeing their expertise as particularly important to their identity and role as a Team Leader: expertise is the reason they manage a team and the basis on which they command respect as the leader of the team. Team Leaders also describe resistance to the perceived organisational discourse that technical expertise is no longer essential for the Team Leader role. Conversely only one Team Leader (D) views their skills and role as having necessarily changed as they moved from technical practice into management. This finding particularly supports those of Gleeson and Knights (2008) who suggest that professionals who move into management roles are often reluctant to give up their identity as professionals and accept a new identity of being a manager or a leader.

Thirdly, there is considerable agreement between Team Leaders when describing activities which they undertake in their organisational role; that is to say the findings show significant clustering of references to certain activities such as being a coach, controlling resources and enforcing organisational and professional standards, and relatively little “scatter” associated with other roles. This is particularly significant given that the findings are drawn from un-prompted references within the texts, and suggests that Team Leaders do carry out similar activities. However, when describing their main purpose as a Team Leader, Team Leader answers were strikingly individual, ranging from “the team’s Friend” (C) to “the Gardener” (E) to “the Buffer” (G). Again, this

supports the work of Alvesson and Willmott (2002) who draw attention to the highly individual nature of identity, and Weick et al (2005) who emphasises how, through sensemaking, individuals make sense of themselves in their own context: thus the context may be similar but the individual's interpretation of it, and their self within it, will be different.

5.3.5 Organisational discourse

The research considers the nature of organisational discourse relating to the Team Leader role. The findings (4.3.3) identify a number of discourses within the organisation, some of which conflict with each other, such as Team Leaders as both active members of the management team and passive instruments of their superordinates, managers or technical experts. This supports Sveningsson and Alvesson's (2003) work which also found evidence of multiple and contradictory discourses in organisations relating to manager role and identity. However, there was little evidence of any attempt by the organisation to actively influence the identity of Team Leaders (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) or to promote discourses of leadership to Team Leaders (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006).

Equally, Team Leader references to organisational discourses suggest that although organisational discourse is a regulatory source of identity (5.3.3) it is not a dominant one. Only one Team Leader (G) identifies a positive organisational discourse in which the role is being professionalised and recognised for its strategic importance, and one Team Leader (F) conversely describes specific resistance to the perceived discourse that professional expertise was not essential to the role. However, other Team Leaders (B, E) describe varying degrees of accommodation with organisational discourses, in attempting to pursue their own interpretation of the role (for example, being available for the team, undertaking casework) while acknowledging the organisational perspective (for example, responsibility for performance management). This agrees with the work of Thomas and Davies (2005) whose case study describes how managers practice resistance, accommodation and reification concurrently, and present themselves as "maverick" in understanding the meaning of their role better than the organisation.

5.3.6 Team Leader role identity – leaders and followers

The literature review concludes that there is insufficient account taken of the position of the majority of managers in organisations when considering identity and leadership identity. Rather than operating discretely, managers are expected to occupy roles as both leaders and followers, and have to negotiate relationships between both subordinates and superordinates.

A conceptual model is therefore proposed which draws on the varying descriptions of manager behaviour found in recent literature, and which proposes that these varying behaviours can be interpreted within the context of the key choices faced by middle managers: whether to act primarily as leaders or followers, and whether to prioritise their relationship with subordinates or superordinates. The Middle Manager Role Matrix identifies four different types of middle manager role positioning based on these dimensions of behaviour and relationship: the Passive Leader, Active Leader, Defensive Leader and Resistance Leader.

The findings as set out in section 4.3.4 strongly support the conceptual model. First, each Team Leader's account of how they see themselves and their role within the organisation can be clearly located within one of the Middle Manager matrix roles: they describe attitudes and behaviours that are recognisable and predicted by the matrix. Second, each of the four roles is clearly represented by at least one Team Leader which further supports the validity of the roles as identified by the matrix. Third, the findings have set out how each of the Middle Manager Matrix roles is associated with the behaviours and relationships as predicted by the matrix. So, for example, Team Leaders who adopt Passive Leader roles (Raes et al 2007) also describe more follower than leader behaviour and focused on superordinate relationships, while those adopting Defensive Leader roles (Jones and Kriflik 2006) describe stronger leader behaviours and place more emphasis on relationships with subordinates.

The findings also support the conceptual model, and its theoretical basis, in a wider sense. The interview texts show that the majority of Team Leaders in the Benefits Service recognise, and are conscious of the choices facing them in their role as middle managers. Only one (A) describes their role as broadly aligned and in harmony with the expectations of subordinates, superordinates and the wider organisation; in all other texts Team Leaders make reference to the tensions implicit and explicit within their role, particularly in the differing expectations of subordinates and superordinates (Gabel 2002, Jones and Kriflik 2006, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006), and the need to adopt a position from which to negotiate those tensions. In other words, Team Leader descriptions of their roles support the argument that being “in the middle” is not a position in itself; the position is only defined by the nature of relationships with subordinates and superordinates (Jones and Kriflik 2006, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006), and the choice of leader or follower behaviour (Lührmann and Eberl 2007).

The findings in relation to the conceptual model also further support the critical nature, and the complexities of individual identity work. The seven Team Leaders clearly described all four Middle Manager matrix roles between them; it might be considered initially surprising to find such diversity expressed in such a small number. There may of course be factors specific to the Benefits Service to explain this diversity; nevertheless, on the surface the Benefits Service appears to be a relatively homogeneous organisation, with the majority of Team Leaders (and staff generally) having been in the same post and having worked with each other for many years. As noted in section 5.3.4 Team Leaders also largely described similar core activities associated with their role. In this context the diversity of Team Leader role interpretations is striking and supports the idea that identity work is a highly individual process (Alvesson and Willmott 2002).

The conceptual model is proposed as a framework to interpret middle manager roles and identity and not as exclusive descriptions of behaviour. The Team Leader accounts also illustrate how Team Leaders may flex between, or adopt different roles. Team Leader F, for example, describes a number of Defensive Leader characteristics, but also adopts a

Resistance Leader discourse. They also suggest an alternative type of Defensive Leader positioning (as well as describing the predicted position) by including their superordinate in their perception of the defensive process against more senior management. However, this does not weaken the validity of the conceptual model in itself; it would not necessarily be expected that middle managers would adopt one type of role position and stick to it. The complexities associated with the middle manager role (Gabel 2002) and the potential for multiple identities (Hill and Stephens 2005, Bazerman et al 1998) would rather suggest that flexing between roles might be expected.

However, through the semi-structured interviews, the research also identifies a further dimension which is not reflected in the original conceptual model. Two Team Leaders refer with some emphasis to a role in which relationships between subordinates and superordinates might be perceived as being genuinely neutral. This is expressed in two particular ways. First, Team Leader G makes repeated reference to their role as a “buffer” in which the Team Leader absorbs, and does not pass on upwards or downwards pressures. Conversely, Team Leader D refers to themselves as a “conduit”, in which their role is to bring subordinate and superordinate expectations and perceptions together, and create agreement and alignment. The implications of this for the further development of the conceptual model are discussed in section 5.4.

The Middle Manager Role Matrix therefore suggests an important addition to the work of Lührmann and Eberl (2007). They build on the three-fold identity construction process developed by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) and propose a four stage process by which leaders and followers construct their respective identities by negotiating their relationships with each other. The Middle Manager Role Matrix, supported by the findings of the Team Leader case study, suggests that this theory needs to be developed further and expanded to take account of the concurrent relationships that middle managers need to negotiate between their own subordinates and their superordinates, and the ways in which the relationship with one affects the relationship with the other.

5.4 Conclusions – Identity construction in the middle manager context

As a case study, the research does not set out to draw generalisable conclusions about middle manager identity construction (Yin 2003). It does aim to carry out an in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon in its context (Robson 2002): how Team Leaders in a large public sector service manage their position “in the middle” and construct their identities. It also attempts an initial test of the Middle Manager Role Matrix to assess its effectiveness in predicting and interpreting role identity as described by Team Leaders in the Benefits Service.

The findings of the case study suggest Team Leaders in the Benefits Service are largely aware of the choices facing them in their role as middle managers, and that these choices – of whether to prioritise relationships with subordinates or superordinates, and whether to act as leaders or followers – are important in the construction of Team Leader identity. Moreover, the case study also supports the validity of the Middle Manager Role Matrix, which predicts roles as described by Team Leaders and predicts the relationships and behaviours associated with those roles.

The research therefore suggests a way of drawing together two threads of literature, by relating the complex processes of identity construction (Alvesson and Willmott 2002), leader-follower identity construction (Lührmann and Eberl 2007) and sensemaking (Weick 1995, Weick et al 2005) with the position of the middle manager (Gabel 2002, Jones and Kriflik 2006, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006). Thus identity construction is shown to be still more complex because of the dual processes of leader and follower identity construction implicit in the middle manager role, and insight is developed into the (internal) identity construction of the middle manager, rather than (external) pressures on the manager.

However, as noted in section 5.3.6 the case study of Team Leaders in the Benefits Service also identifies two further roles not reflected in the original conceptual model, those of the Buffer and the Conduit (or Mediator). These roles, which are given

considerable weight by the Team Leaders who best describe them, do not easily fit into the existing conceptual model and consequently the conceptual model needs to be reviewed.

The two roles share some common features. They both suggest that, rather than choosing to prioritise relationships with subordinates or superordinates, the middle manager has adopted a position of neutrality between the two. In this context, each role expresses a different dimension of the neutral relationship. The Buffer role keeps subordinates and superordinates separate, by absorbing and not passing on the respective pressures and expectations of each: it offers a degree of protection to each from the other. This reflects the work of Jones and Kriflik (2006) who describe the middle manager as “shielding” subordinates from the demands of senior managers; the Buffer role suggests that the middle manager may also “shield” more senior managers from concerns and dissent from subordinates. The Mediator role, on the other hand, seeks to bring subordinates and superordinates together, by using the manager’s position “in the middle” to negotiate between the two sets of expectations, to develop mutual understanding between subordinates and superordinates by having an understanding themselves of the respective positions, and to create alignment. This echoes the strategies of Gabel (2002) for managers dealing with multiple stakeholder expectations, in expressing and clarifying differences between positions.

These roles can be interpreted in two ways. The first way is to develop the Middle Manager Role Matrix to accommodate this additional dimension as follows:

| | | Key Relationship | | |
|----------|----------|------------------------------|---|--|
| | | Superordinate | Neutral | Subordinate |
| Key Role | Follower | <i>Passive Leader</i> | <i>Buffer</i> (dimension of <i>Passive Leader?</i>) | <i>Resistance (Maverick) Leader</i> |
| | Leader | <i>Active Leader</i> | <i>Conduit</i> (dimension of <i>Active Leader?</i>) | <i>Defensive Leader</i> |

Figure 7 – the Middle Manager Role Matrix - expanded

These new roles do suggest additional insight into the potential roles available to the middle manager. In particular it acknowledges that, for some middle managers, their position in the middle may itself be the key to their identity and that they may positively eschew making a choice in their relationships between subordinates and superordinates. However, this extended conceptual model requires further testing to see whether the additional dimension remains valid. The Team Leaders who refer most to these additional roles also closely fit existing roles from the conceptual model: Team Leader G, the Buffer, also closely describes being a Passive Leader and Team Leader D (the Mediator) an Active Leader. Further research therefore needs to establish whether these additional roles can be seen as genuinely (and usefully) distinct, or whether they are actually dimensions of Passive and Active Leader (or other) roles.

5.5 Limitations

The major limitation of this study, which has already been discussed in some detail, is that as a single case study it is not possible to repeat the results in another context or to

generalise from the results (Yin 2003). In this sense the research is limited in the conclusions that may be drawn about leader-follower identity outside of the context of the Team Leader role in the LDL Benefits Service. Nevertheless, through the case study of the Team Leader role and the successful testing of the Middle Manager Role Matrix, the research suggests that the choices of relationship and behaviour implicit in the middle manager role of both leader and follower are significant in the construction of middle manager identity, and therefore opens up a new potentially rich vein for further research.

5.6 Opportunities for further research

There are a number of ways in which the findings from this research could be further tested and developed. First, the conceptual model has been shown to be sufficiently robust to support further testing and refinement. This could be effectively achieved through further case studies, carried out using similar qualitative methods such as interviews, which would not only test the model and the validity of the suggested additional dimensions, but facilitate the identification of possible further nuances within it. Case studies carried out in a variety of contexts, for example the private sector, and with higher graded middle managers would further test the potential of the model to be a generalisable tool. Once the conceptual model has been tested and refined through further and varied case studies, quantitative research should be undertaken to test its generalisability.

A particular area of interest would be to further explore whether and how the conceptual model could be integrated with Lührmann and Eberl's (2007) work on leader-follower identity development. Their identification of the dynamics of identity building processes, the necessary negotiation that must take place between leaders and followers and the effects of each identity construction on the other fits closely with the conceptual model and the finding of this research. The Middle Manager Role Matrix adds to Lührmann and Eberl (2007) by drawing attention to the fact that middle managers will be engaging in often simultaneous identity construction processes as leaders and as followers, and opens

up the question of how middle managers negotiate these dual processes. Conversely, Lührmann and Eberl (2007) suggest a possible way of describing and interpreting the processes of choosing between key relationships and behaviours which the Middle Manager Role Matrix suggests middle managers undergo. Integration of the two models therefore offers a potentially valuable tool for gaining a richer understanding of middle manager identity construction.

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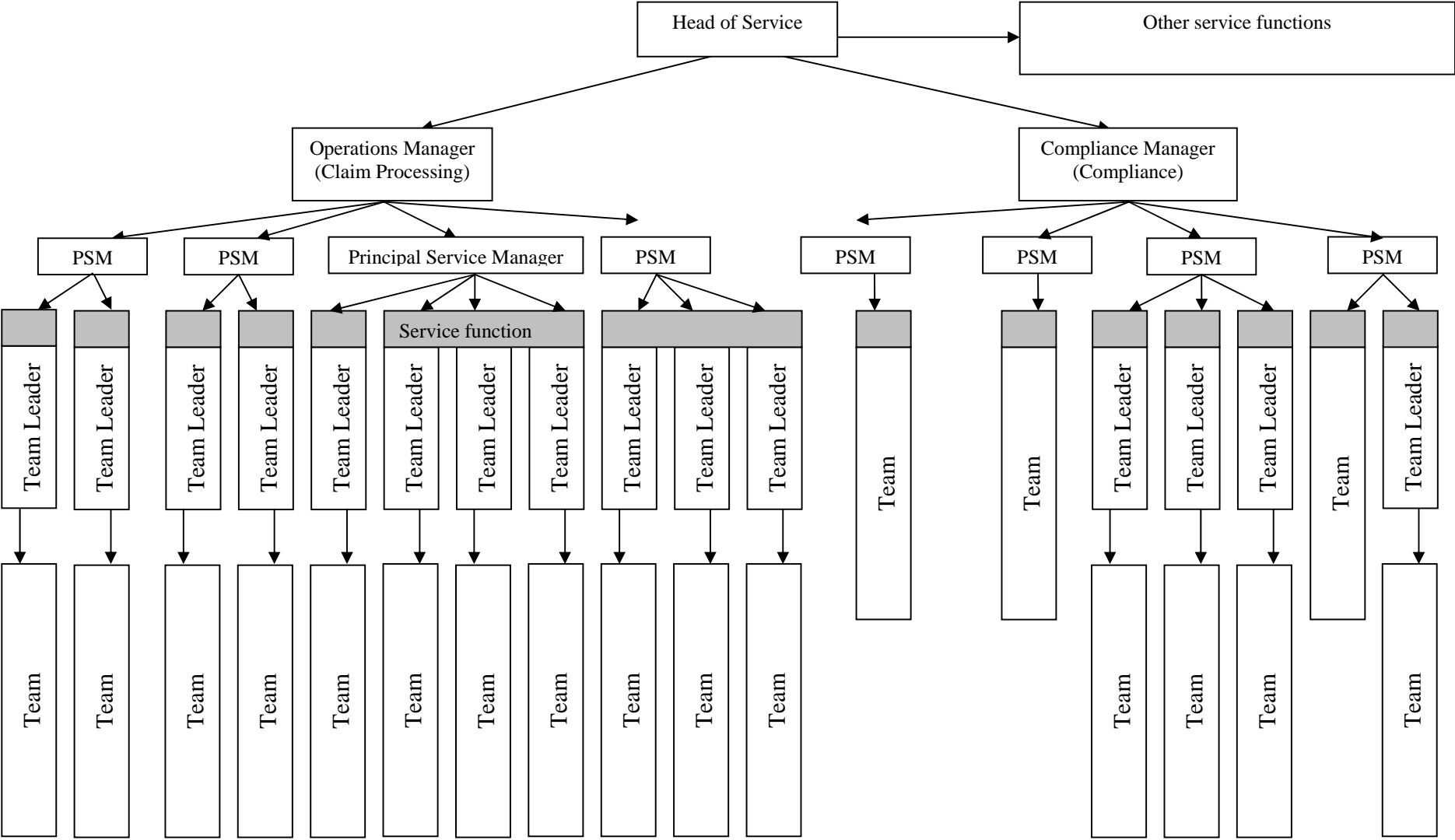
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Appendix 1 - Benefits Service Organisational Structure (simplified)



Appendix 2 – Research instruments

Team Leader interview questions

Principal Service Manager/Senior Manager interview questions

Written conformation of interview invitation

Information sheet for interviewees

Interview consent form

Research diary (excerpts)

Team Leader Interview Questions

1. Personal identity and identity construction

| No. | Question | Purpose/justification | Notes |
|-----|---|--|---|
| 1.1 | How long have you been a Team Leader in the Benefits Service? | Background information | Easy questions to start (King 2004) |
| 1.2 | <p>Why (how) did you become a Team Leader?</p> <p><i>What was your main motivation?</i></p> <p><i>What influenced you in deciding to apply?</i></p> <p><i>What made you think you could be a team leader? (Can you give an example?)</i></p> <p><i>What made you want to become a team leader? (Can you give an example?)</i></p> | <p>Background information – personal history</p> <p>Identify critical incidents / influences (Toor and Ofori 2008); possible effect of organisational discourse (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Sveningsson and Larsson 2006), reluctance to undertake role (Gleeson and Knights 2008, Gabel 2002)</p> | May also offer insight into organisational discourse – which people are putting themselves forward as team leaders and why? |

2. The nature of team leader identities

| No. | Question | Purpose/justification | Notes |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 2.1 | <p>(Thinking about how <u>you</u> see your role) how would you describe the main purpose of the Team Leader?</p> <p><i>What do you think you are really there for?</i></p> | <p>Self-identity in the organisational context (Alvesson and Wilmott 2002, Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager</p> | Deliberately not using the words “leader” or “leadership” except in job title to elicit how post holder sees role |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|
| | <p><i>Can you give an example of this “main purpose” / how you carry it out?</i></p> <p><i>Why do you think this? What has influenced your ideas?</i></p> <p><i>Has your perception of your “main purpose” changed over time? Why?</i></p> | Role matrix) | |
| 2.2 | <p>How easy is it to carry out this “main purpose”?</p> <p><i>Can you give an example (of how it was easy or difficult)</i></p> <p><i>Does everyone else in the organisation agree with this “main purpose”?</i></p> <p><i>What do other people think your “main purpose” is?</i></p> | <p>Relationship with organisational discourse (Sveningsson and Alvesson 2003)</p> <p>Conflicts between interpretations of leader/follower role (Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | |
| 2.3 | <p>How would you describe your working relationships with other Team Leaders?</p> <p><i>Do you feel part of a peer group? Do you have a sense of being part of a group who do similar work and share similar challenges?</i></p> <p><i>Do you discuss your jobs, shared problems etc? Do you meet with other Team Leaders regularly?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think they share your ideas about the</i></p> | <p>Influence of peers on identity (Brown and Humphries 2006)</p> <p>Identify extent of collective Team Leader (peer) identity</p> | |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| | <i>“main purpose” of the role?</i> | | |
| 2.4 | <p>How would you describe your working relationships with your team?</p> <p><i>How do they see you? (Example?) (If applicable) How did you deal with having to manage your former colleagues?</i></p> <p><i>How do you see them? (Example?)</i></p> <p><i>Would they agree with your “main purpose” of your role?</i></p> | <p>Influence of followers on identity (Luhman and Eberl 2007, Pye 2005, Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe 2006, Jones and Kriflik 2006)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | |
| 2.5 | <p>How would you describe your working relationship with Principal Officers?</p> <p><i>How do they see you? (Example?)</i></p> <p><i>How do you see them? (Example?)</i></p> <p><i>Would they agree with your “main purpose” of your role?</i></p> | <p>Influence of superordinates on identity (Lurhman and Eberl 2007, Raes et al 2007)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | <p>Opening in out to POs means interviewees may feel answers are less personalised.</p> <p>Some will have worked under different POs and POs cover each other during absence.</p> <p>Enables interview to focus on perception of roles rather than individuals.</p> |
| 2.6 | <p>Do you ever experience tension or conflict between what Principal Officers expect of you, and what your team expect of you? (Or have you experienced this in the past?)</p> <p><i>Can you give an example?</i></p> | <p>Effect of “managing in the middle” (Gabel 2002, Jones and Kriflik 2006)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | <i>How did you deal with it (or not deal with it?) / how do you manage this situation?</i> | | |
|--|--|--|--|

3. Organisational discourse

| No. | Question | Purpose/justification | Notes |
|-----|--|--|-------|
| 3.1 | <p>The Benefits Service describes your role as a “Team Leader”. What do you think being a leader means?</p> <p><i>What qualities do you show as a leader?</i></p> <p><i>What activities do you do as a leader?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think you are a leader?</i></p> <p><i>Do you feel the organisation treats you as a leader?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think the organisation expects you to do as a leader?</i></p> | <p>Identify organisational discourse on leadership (Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003)</p> <p>Identify individual understanding of leadership and extent of identification with organisational discourse</p> | |
| 3.2 | What training or coaching have you had as a leader? | Identify organisational discourse on leadership (Alvesson and Willmott | |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| | <p><i>Was it useful/important?</i></p> <p><i>Did you agree? Did it make sense in your role?</i></p> <p><i>Did it make any difference to how you see your role?</i></p> | 2002) | |
| 3.3 | <p>Do you think the Benefits Service makes the best use of the Team Leader role?</p> <p><i>Are there ways in which the service could make better use? Examples?</i></p> <p><i>Do you feel you are being under- or over-used? Can you give an example?</i></p> | <p>Identify individual understanding of role</p> <p>Identify extent of understanding of and identification with organisational discourse (Alvesson and Willmott 2002)</p> <p>Identify wider organisational issues of resource, control, particularly in public sector context (Jones and Kriflik 2006, Gabel 2002, Pedersen and Hartley 2008)</p> | <p>May summarise respondent's views but also provide necessary context of wider tensions within the organisation</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Is there anything else that you would like to say about your role as a Team Leader in the Benefits Service?</p> | | <p>Allow interviewee to add anything they consider important or which has occurred to them.</p> <p>Help to ensure the interview ends on a note of the interviewee's choosing.</p> |

Principal Service Manager / Senior Manager Interview Questions

The Team Leader Role

| No. | Question | Purpose/justification | Notes |
|-----|--|--|-------|
| 1.1 | <p>What do you think is the main purpose of the Team Leader role in the Benefits Service?</p> <p><i>What do you think Team Leaders are really there for?</i></p> <p><i>Can you give an example of this “main purpose”?</i></p> <p><i>What key functions do Team Leaders carry out?</i></p> | <p>Identify organisational discourse (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003, Sveningsson and Larsson 2006)</p> <p>Identify organisational structure and job description (Lurhman and Eberl 2007)</p> <p>Senior management perceptions of Team Leader identity (Raes et al 2007)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | |
| 1.2 | <p>How well do you think Team Leaders carry out this main purpose?</p> <p><i>Can you give an example (of how this purpose is carried out, or how Team Leaders fail to carry it out)</i></p> | <p>Senior management perceptions of Team Leader qualities and abilities (Raes et al 2007)</p> <p>Relationship between organisational discourse and reality (Sveningsson and Larsson 2006, Alvesson and</p> | |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|
| | <p><i>Do you think that Team Leaders agree with you about their main purpose? (Do you think that Principal Officers agree with you?)</i></p> <p><i>What do you think Team Leaders (Principal Officers) think their “main purpose” is?</i></p> | Sveningsson 2003, Sveningsson and Alveson 2003) | |
| 1.3 | <p><i>What do you think are the key qualities of an effective Team Leader?</i></p> <p><i>How would you describe the ideal Team Leader?</i></p> <p><i>What behaviours do you expect?</i></p> <p><i>Can you give an example of why they are important?</i></p> <p><i>To what extent do you think the current Team Leaders have these qualities?</i></p> <p><i>What does, or can the organisation do to help Team Leaders develop these qualities?</i></p> | <p>Senior management perceptions and expectations of Team Leader qualities and abilities (Raes et al 2007)</p> <p>Influence of superordinates on identity (Lurhman and Eberl 2007, Raes et al 2007)</p> | |
| 1.4 | <p><i>What do you understand by “leadership” in the context of the Team Leader role?</i></p> <p><i>What qualities do you think Team Leaders should show as “leaders”?</i></p> <p><i>What activities do they do as “leaders”?</i></p> | <p>Identify organisational discourse on leadership (e.g. Alvesson and Willmott 2002, Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003, Sveningsson and Larsson 2006)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | Leadership may have come up in answer to question 1.3 |

| | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|
| | <p><i>Do you think Team Leaders see themselves as leaders?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think the Team Leader title is important or significant? Would it make any difference if they were called something else?</i></p> | | |
| 1.5 | <p>How would you describe the relationship between Team Leaders and Principal Officers?</p> <p><i>How would you distinguish between the two roles? (Respective responsibilities?)</i></p> <p><i>How should the two roles interact for the effective functioning of the service?</i></p> <p><i>How do you think Principal Officers and Team Leaders see each other?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think that there are potential or actual conflicts between the roles? If so, why? (If not, why?) Can you give an example?</i></p> | <p>Identify organisational structure and job description (Lurhman and Eberl 2007)</p> <p>Identify organisational expectations of leader roles (Gabel 2002, Sheard and Kakabadse 2002)</p> <p>Interpretation of leader/follower role (applicability of the Middle Manager Role matrix)</p> | |
| 1.6 | <p>What training, support and supervision is available for Team Leaders?</p> <p><i>What formal training is provided?</i></p> <p><i>How is this intended to enable Team Leaders to carry out their role?</i></p> | <p>Relationship between training and organisational discourse (Alvesson and Willmott 2002)</p> | |

| | | | |
|-----|--|--|--|
| 1.7 | <p>What is the purpose of Service Area Review meetings?</p> <p><i>How do they contribute towards the management of the organisation?</i></p> <p><i>How do they relate to the Team Leader role? What contribution are Team Leaders expected to make?</i></p> <p><i>What contribution do Team Leaders (actually) make?</i></p> | Identify organisational structure and job description (Lurhman and Eberl 2007) | Provides me with context for observing Team Leader behaviour, contribution and interaction with Principal Officers at SARs |
| 1.8 | <p>Overall, to what extent are you satisfied with the current Team Leader role as understood and practiced in the Benefits Service?</p> <p><i>Does the Team Leader role generally work? In what ways?</i></p> <p><i>Are there ways in which it does not work well? Can you give examples?</i></p> <p><i>Would you like to make any changes? If so, what?</i></p> | | <p>Enable the manager to add anything else about the Team Leader role.</p> <p>Enable the senior manager to close on a positive note, for example by suggesting improvements they would ideally make.</p> |

Invitation to interview – Email confirmation text

Dear

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in an interview for my MBA dissertation.

My subject for research is the role of the Team Leader within the Benefits Service, and in particular how Team Leaders themselves interpret and carry out their role in the organisation. The main purpose of the interview would be for me to gain an understanding of your own thoughts and perceptions as to what being a Team Leader in the Benefits Service means to you.

The interview should take approximately one hour and will cover the following topics:

- o How and why you became a Team Leader
- o What you think the main purpose of the Team Leader is
- o Your working relationships with other Team Leaders, your team and your line manager
- o What you think “leadership” means for being a Team Leader
- o Training and support you receive as a Team Leader

I am also attaching an information sheet which provides further information about the interview and what the data collected will and will not be used for.

If you are still happy to go ahead, please let me know your availability over the next couple of weeks, and I will arrange a time and venue to suit your availability.

Once again, many thanks.

Alison Rostron

MBA Dissertation Chester Business School

Information Sheet for Interviewees

Research Title:

Building from the middle: how middle managers construct and manage identity in roles as both leader and follower

Name of Researcher: Alison Rostron

The nature of the research

- This research project is being undertaken as part of a Masters degree in Business Administration. The primary purpose of the research is to enable the successful completion of the degree. It has not been commissioned by the Benefits Service or by LDL, although the Head of Benefits has given approval to undertake this research within the Benefits Service.
- The aim of the research is to investigate how managers experience and interpret their roles, in which they are simultaneously leaders (of teams) and followers (of their own line managers and senior managers) and how they manage these roles in practice. The research will use the role of the Team Leaders in the Benefits Service as a case study.
- Interviews will be carried out with approximately seven Team Leaders. Interviews will also be carried out with three or four Principal and Senior Officers, to gain an organisational perspective on the Team Leader role.

Taking part in interviews

- Taking part in this interview is entirely voluntary. If you later change your mind about taking part you may withdraw at any time.

- You will not be named in the research as a participant and your answers and will not be reported in such a way that you could be identified. Any colleagues referred to by you will also be anonymised so that they cannot be identified.
- Anything you say during the interview will not be repeated or used outside the interview for any purpose other than the research project.
- You have the right not to answer any question.
- You will be asked at the beginning of the interview whether you agree to the interview being recorded. If you do not agree, no voice recorder will be used. (However, the interview may take slightly longer because of the researcher's need to make notes.)

The use and reporting of data collected

- The digital recordings (or the notes) of the interviews will be transcribed. These transcripts will be securely held by the researcher and used solely for the purpose of the research project. The transcripts will only be seen by the researcher and by any University of Chester or external examiner who wishes to check the validity of the research data.
- After the research dissertation has been assessed all digital recordings, notes and transcripts will be securely destroyed.
- Two copies of the dissertation will be submitted to the University of Chester. A copy will also be given to the Head of Benefits.
- A summary report of findings will be made available to all participants on request.

Contact

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact Alison Rostron on 07921 284900 or email alison.rostron@liverpooldirectlimited.co.uk.

**MBA Dissertation
Chester Business School**

Consent Form for Interviewees

Research Title:

Building from the middle: how middle managers construct and manage identity in roles as both leader and follower

Name of Researcher: Alison Rostron

- ☐ I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet about participating in the above study.
- ☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- ☐ I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:

Signed:

Date:

Name of researcher: Alison Rostron

Signed:

Date:

Research Diary – excerpts

11.2.2009 – Pilot Interview

Carried out full pilot interview with Team Leader.

Information sheet clearly explained everything, no need for interviewee to ask further questions.

OK to use digital voice recorder and it didn't appear to distract either of us. Clearly picked up both voices on testing.

Interview lasted just over one hour (1 hr 2 min). Didn't feel as though we had needed to rush, and opportunities to explore particular points as they seemed relevant to me. Interviewee had plenty to say, others may not be as forthcoming.

...

I felt that my instinct to keep (formal) questions very open, and to keep more specific questions as prompt or follow-up questions was justified. In most cases I got a relevant answer from the initial question, into which I could naturally dig more deeply. My instinct is still that the interviewee's initial response to the question may be the most crucial, as the more I ask, the more I risk inadvertently determining responses.

...

On occasion I realised that, when an answer seemed to fit with my conceptual model or bear out a particular theory, I was tempted to rephrase the answer in terms of that model (for example, when recapping what interviewee saw as their "main purpose" I found myself creating summary labels which fitted my theory). I must guard against this and ensure that I do not give the interviewee any sense that they are telling me what I want to hear.

20.2.2009 – Interview with Senior Officer

Need to be careful not to let my own views come across or influence the conversation – one instance where we were discussing PO involvement/interference in Team Leader responsibilities, where I instinctively gave my own assessment of PO motivation, without thinking. It is very easy to forget my role as a researcher and slip into the role of a manager – particularly when I am interviewing a peer.

Appendix 3 – Analytical instruments

Text coding

Collating texts (excerpt)

Text Coding

1. Team Leader Identity Regulation

The effects of social practices on identity

The influences of key relationships

| | |
|----------|--------------------------|
| REG-PEER | Peers |
| REG-SUB | Subordinates |
| REG-SUP | Superordinates |
| REG-ORG | Organisational discourse |
| REG-EXT | Outside influences |
| REG-ROLE | Role (I am what I do) |

2. Team Leader Self-Identity

The personal meaning of the Team Leader role to the Team Leader

“As a Team Leader, I am...”

The meaning of the Team Leader role – actual and perceived functions

2.1 In the middle (being the “portal” between PO and team)

| | |
|----------|--|
| MEA-BUFF | Buffer (absorbing upward/downward pressures i.e. not (wholly) passing them on) |
| MEA-MID | Conduit – being the “link”, bringing sides together |
| MEA-MESS | Messenger (delivering the message downwards) |
| MEA-INF | Informer (reporting upwards – keeping line manager informed) |
| MEA-SUP | Supporter (of management and the organisation; defending decisions) |
| MEA-PRO | Protector/defender (of staff, from upper management); challenging decisions of upper management; representative of staff |

2.2 Task-focused responsibilities

| | |
|-------------|--|
| MEA-PROB-TL | Problem-solver (fixing, fire-fighting) |
| MEA-DEC-TL | Decision maker (taking / having responsibility for decisions) |
| MEA-MAI-TL | Maintainer (keeping things ticking over; a watching brief; supervision) |
| MEA-IMP-TL | Implementer (making change happen) |
| MEA-DEL-TL | Deliverer (making sure things happen) |
| MEA-CON-TL | Controller (managing resources, allocating work) |
| MEA-ENF-TL | Enforcer (preventing errors, wrong things happening; exercising authority) |
| MEA-IDEA-TL | Ideas generator; change initiator |

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------------|
| MEA-CSLT | Consultant – running proposals past |
| MEA-STR | Strategic thinker / planner |

2.3 People-focused responsibilities

| | |
|-------------|---|
| MEA-COA-TL | Coach (supporting, training staff to improve capability and performance; mentoring) |
| MEA-EMP-TL | Empowerer (encouraging, developing personal responsibility amongst staff) |
| MEA-MOT-TL | Motivator (inspiring team; creating agreement and engagement) |
| MEA-HR-TL | HR/Line manager (being a line manager – HR functions; discipline) |
| MEA-PERF-TL | Performance manager (ensuring individual targets are set and adhered to) |
| MEA-EXAM_TL | Setting / leading by example; setting standards of behaviour |
| MEA-TEA-TL | Team development (supporting, listening, mentoring, fostering team spirit) |
| MEA-LIST-TL | Personal support – listening ear (including non-work) |

2.4 Professional

| | |
|------------|---|
| MEA-EXP-TL | Expert (being a specialist in the team's work) <i>could sit in either; or represent conscious decision to reject organisational discourse</i> |
|------------|---|

3. Team Leader Identity Work

*The process of forming, repairing and maintaining identity constructions
How do I manage the competing relationships which I have to fulfil in the role?*

3.1 Relationships and behaviours

| | |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| ROL-LEA | Leader role |
| ROL-FOL | Follower role |
| ROL-SUP | Relationship with superordinate |
| ROL-SUB | Relationship with subordinate |

3.2 Roles

| | |
|---------|---|
| ROL-PAS | Passive Leader (follower; focus on superordinate) |
| ROL-ACT | Active Leader (leader; focus on superordinate) |
| ROL-DEF | Defensive Leader (leader; focus on subordinates) |
| ROL-RES | Resistance Leader (follower; focus on subordinates / other) |

Collating texts - excerpt

Professional

Expert (being a specialist in the team's work)

...

- TL-A – Expertise was why they saw themselves as a potential Team Leader
- TL-A – Team Leaders don't have as much time to do assessing because of other duties – “So what I tend to do is when I've caught up on all my management stuff and I'm on top of that, I just become one of my staff and I do the job that they do. Cos it keeps me in touch with the job that I'm supposed to be here for. And that's to mentor people through errors.”
- TL-A – emphasis on enforcement – correcting errors, ensuring consistency, quality (people development in terms of correcting errors)
- TL-B – Role is essential to teams (driven by team's expectations?) – “And I think sometimes we do lose sight of the fact that the staff at the bottom, at the ground root, if you like, they need to draw from people, from somebody, and it's their Team Leader who's with them all the time.”
- TL-B – “A few years ago it was sort of said to us that your role now isn't to get involved with casework as such, your role is to manage...But in essence that's never worked. That doesn't exist at all. If you're a Team Leader on a team the first port of call for one of your staff, if they're stuck on something, they're going to ask the Team Leader. That's part of why you're there.”
- TL-C – Expertise underpins and defines the role – “To me you're only as good as your Team Leader. So if you're a Team Leader who doesn't know the job and you don't know your way around the system, how are you meant to help your staff? How are you meant to help them with their performance and their accuracy?”
- TL-C – “I think I've got their respect cos they know that I can do their job. I'm not asking them to do something that I can't do myself.”
- TL-C – “If you're a Team Leader who can't assess then you can't help [PO] in that way.”

...

Appendix 4 – Coded interview transcript – excerpts

Team Leader G – how Team Leaders see their role

| | | |
|---|------|--|
| | AR | Thinking about how you see your role - so not necessarily what anyone else thinks, how you see your role - how would you describe the main purpose of the team leader? |
| MEA-CON MEA-DEL MEA-PROB MEA-CON MEA-MESS | TL-G | As I see my role, in my current position, is, erm, allocating the work, making sure it's actually done, that it's collated, that it's monitored, that, erm, I fire fight some issues that [pause] before they get to another level, that I sort of manage the admin of the workflow, that I act as a go-between, between what [Principal Service Manager] wants and I communicate that to the staff. |
| ROL-SUP | | I couldn't ask for a better manager than [PSM]. <i>[Text deleted to protect identity]</i> |
| ROL-FOL | | But I think that [PSM], for all [their] positive things, [their] flaw is [they are] controlling. [They] can't let anything go, |
| REG-SUP | | [they] wants to do so much [themselves], that in a way, my role... I do, like, all the rubbish and all the, you know, I call it fire fighting but do you know what I mean. |
| MEA-BUFF MEA-CON | | I soak up all the gripes and pressure, making sure it's all there of a morning before I go home, make sure the work's going to be there for them, erm... |
| MEA-LIST | | All their problems, cos, obviously [PSM] is not going to deal with that. |

Team Leader A – relations with subordinates and superordinates

| | | |
|--|------|---|
| | AR | Insofar as it's ever possible to know, how do your team, your teams, see you? What do they think you're here to do? |
| MEA-ENF MEA-MAI MEA-ENF MEA-ENF | TL-A | My current team just see me as someone who makes sure we're all doing the same job, who's guiding them, ensuring that we're giving the same message, we're keeping the standards of quality up of our work. The other lot just saw me as someone who was a constant disciplinarian who was there the crack the whip over them. |
| | AR | And how would you describe your working relationships, the nature of your working relationships with Principal Officers? |
| ROL-SUP ROL-FOL MEA-DEL | TL-A | Erm. They are ensuring that obviously messages are coming down as well, and intermittently things might need to be re-jigged slightly. So that's more of an instantaneous message that comes from them, quite often. But they're obviously there to ensure that their staff, including myself, are also delivering the promises that we're making and the quality that we're promising to deliver. |

| | |
|---------|--|
| ROL-SUP | Obviously where it comes to the Principal Officers there's a slightly different relationship there cos I've known a lot of them for twenty odd years. So it's quite a friendly relationship as well. It's not a Do As I Say kind of relationship. It's not like that at all, it's very friendly and informal. |
| ROL-FOL | But nevertheless there's still a message there that needs to be adhered to and recognised. But because I've known them so well they're good friends as well, and that makes it a bit different from somebody who is obviously higher up the chain of command and order, it's not like an order cos it's not like the military here, is it, it's more friendly. |
| ROL-FOL | You know – [Team Leader A], don't forget, could you just make sure, thanks a lot - and they know that I'll do that and I'll pass on that information, |
| MEA-DEL | I will get that job done, whatever. Obviously because of their experience of working with me. |

Team Leader F – organisational discourse

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| | AR | You've described quite clearly what you think you're here to do as a Team Leader. Do you think that's shared generally within the organisation? |
| REG-ORG | TL-E | Well, I have heard some senior, senior managers don't know what the Team Leaders do all day. They honestly think that we just - |
| MEA-EXP | | I don't think they really appreciate the amount of questions that we get from the staff, |
| MEA-COA | | the level of involvement that we have in helping the teams, all the coaching. |
| ROL-SUB | | They probably think, well there's mentors there, there's checkers there, so they're the people staff would go to, but that's not the case. I've got [number of] staff, so you can't expect them to just go to other people, and I don't think they appreciate the level of involvement that Team Leaders have in dealing with all the queries every day. |
| MEA-EXP | | Especially when LHA came in, it was just constant, all day, every day, just questions and questions. And even though you'd been on the same training course as them you were expected to know all the answers. |
| MEA-EXP | | I don't know whether they do know what we do all day. I remember one time when [senior manager] came and asked all the Team Leaders to - on their calendars, their email calendars, to write down every half hour what they were doing. Initially I think it was only about four of us who filled it in. But at the time it was when I-World had just come in, it was still a bit hectic, we were still trying to change things and whatnot. And staff were just constantly asking questions, and staff were coming from other teams, walking past their own Team Leaders and asking myself or another Team Leader questions. I don't know why, maybe they thought we knew better. |
| REG-ROL | | So it's really hard to quantify, when you're getting pulled away every two minutes for different things, what you do. And there was another Team Leader who - all they did was allocate the work into the trays for staff to drip. So because their day looked really structured and really organised, [senior manager] thought that was the best way to be, because they could account for every single minute of their day. |
| MEA-COA | | Where I couldn't do that, because I was constantly mentoring staff, coaching them, |
| MEA-ENF | | constantly checking the work for them. |

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| ROLE-RES | | So I think sometimes, unless you're sitting there visibly doing a piece of work, or you can account for every single minute of your day, I think sometimes it can be construed that you're not really doing anything. And that's probably so much not the case. Because you can't equate for the ten, fifteen minutes every half hour where you're helping somebody. You know, you come down to me and I'm in the middle of something, trying to give somebody advice. |
| | AR | It doesn't show up on the system. |
| ROL-RES | TL-E | And I remember this person got a bottle of wine cos they were really organised and I wasn't bothered about the bottle of wine, but I remember going to see [senior manager] and saying you can't ask Team Leaders to equate what they do every ten minutes. Because every ten minutes you'll be doing something different, and you can't put that on your calendar, cos your calendar day'd be about that long [gestures, laughs]. |
| REG-ROL | | So it's fine to look organised and you've done that piece of work, but I think a proper Team Leader probably doesn't have their backside on a chair for more than ten minutes at a time. |